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Editorial Introduction

Introducing our November 1980 special issue on "Science Fiction and the Non-Print Media," we observed that none of the contributed articles dealt with "SF film released before the late 1960s or...productions outside the US." And of the four contributions to our 1983 special issue on "Extraliterary Forms of Science Fiction," only Manfred Nagl's essay on "The Science-Fiction Film in Historical Perspective" treats non-American SF film.

We are pleased to report that the above situation has been remedied somewhat with this special issue. Simonetta Salvestroni's opening essay examines two SF films—*Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1980)—by the Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, and the following essay by Paul Coates, "Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine," focusses on *La Jetée* (1962), Marker's 29-minute SF classic of time travel. And with Coates' essay, we can now say that we have at least one study of an SF film released before 1965!

As was the case with our previous writers, the contributors to this issue approach their subjects from a variety of critical perspectives. Salvestroni demonstrates that while Tarkovsky's SF films partake of the "fantastic strain" in classical Russian and Soviet literature, he exploits the visual potentialities of film by using images rather than verbal signs to reveal theme. Employing contrasting spatial imagery, juxtaposing black and white and color, interweaving archetypal images, Tarkovsky creates a rich texture open to multiple interpretations as he examines the problematics of communication, the confrontation with the Other, the contrast between the drab, deterministic here-and-now with possible, wholly strange but incredibly rich alternative worlds, how the journey without becomes the journey within and the processes of the transformation of the self. Similarly, while beginning his essay on Marker by acknowledging what is by now a standard idea—that time travel emerged as a literary theme in the work of Wells and was a response to some of the cultural and political strands of the *fin de siècle*—Coates makes an original and compelling case for linking the time-travel theme to "the simultaneous emergence of cinema, with its capacity to manipulate the illusion of time." Like Salvestroni, Coates focusses on the visual image and Marker's use of still photographs to reveal theme and control tone, in addition to making the provocative suggestion that the cinema incorporates its audience as time travellers.

Co-authors Peter C. Hall and Richard D. Erlich, in "Beyond Topeka and Thunderdome," attend to two films, *A Boy and His Dog* (1975) and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). Their discussion makes use of the categories and follows the argument developed by Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. At the same time, they show how content can deform as recent

post-nuclear holocaust films inflect the traditional comic-romance pattern through satire and a combination of mythic patterns.

Both Thomas B. Byers' "Commodity Futures" and Peter Fitting's "Futurecop" take a sociological-cum-Marxist approach to their subjects but arrive at slightly different conclusions regarding the one film they treat in common: *Blade Runner*.

Byers compares *Alien* (1979), *Blade Runner* (1972), and *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982) with respect to the ways in which they deal with the contradictory relationship between "high-tech corporate capitalism on the one hand, and individual modes and styles of personal behavior on the other." *Alien* and *Blade Runner* depict a future capitalistic society which dehumanizes those subject to its control. The distinctions separating aliens and "replicants" (in *Blade Runner*) from humans are problematic. By contrast, *Star Trek II* reaffirms the values of the System (bourgeois capitalism) and celebrates the power of white, male America.

Fitting, however, comes to different conclusions about *Blade Runner*. Comparing the film and Dick's novel with respect to their thematic differences, including the distinction between human and non-human and our relationship to technology—situated as we are in an exploitative economic and political structure—Fitting argues that although not fully successful, Dick's novel provides sharper distinctions and clearer ethical choices than *Blade Runner* does. The film instead confuses the distinctions between androids and humans—Byers' point, too—and thereby dramatizes the contradictory possibilities of human liberation (i.e., the replicants will do all of the unappealing and dangerous work) and the "terrible price of that seductive empowerment in the substitution for our humanity of the qualities and characteristics of the machine." Unlike Byers, however, Fitting contends that in contrast to the novel, *Blade Runner* foregrounds and sensationalizes violence in a way that "legitimizes [its] use...in defense of the status quo even if that world is repressive and unjust" and at the same time redirects our rage away from that repressive and exploitative system and at its victims-cum-outlaws; and in that way it finally reinforces the status quo, "a cynical denial of th[e] message of the major themes of Dick's book.

Todd H. Sammons uses a traditional—albeit meticulous and comprehensive—comparative and historical approach to *Return of the Jedi*. Taking seriously George Lucas' comment that Lucas looks at "art, all of art, as graffiti," Sammons shows how Lucas draws upon bits and pieces of epic poetry—Homer, Virgil, the Beowulf poet, Dante, Milton, etc.—to give his film its structure, theme, and tone. While *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) drew on the graffiti of the American western and stories of World War II, evoking Luke Skywalker's boyhood, and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) drew on Freudian psychology appropriate to Luke's psychological struggles as an adolescent, *Jedi* marks Luke's maturity, most fittingly represented by epic poetry. The sheer number of epic analogies and parallels which Sammons finds in this film is truly remarkable.

In our final essay, written by the only contributor represented in all three of our special issues to date, Andrew Gordon deploys his thorough knowledge of Freudian theory not only to explain the popularity of *Back to the*

Future, but also to explicate some of that SF film's more interesting but puzzling scenes. Gordon describes it as a "therapeutic family comedy," a time-travel story which uses comedy to deal with our social anxieties about the future and our deep-seated personal anxieties surrounding the incest taboo. *Back to the Future* "allows us to laugh at potentially dangerous material by placing it in the context of classic film comedy and situation comedy and by deliberately using stock character types."

Our next special issue on the extraliterary forms of SF—and, inevitably, there will be a fourth number on the subject—may well reflect the fact that we are entering a new era of art and of art criticism. In his review of Vivian Sobchack's updated version of *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, Gordon describes the new situation most succinctly: "Mass culture has gone postmodern with a vengeance." We seem to be on the threshold of a new *epistèmè*, where the Real is entangled with and indistinguishable from—to use Baudrillard's terminology—the hyperreal, where one can boldly assert, as Baudrillard does, that "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (*Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss *et al.* [NY: Semiotext(e), 1983], p. 25). Within this context, Gordon's observation that "SF may be in danger of disappearing as a separable genre" may indeed be prophetic. The next few years should be telling.

Simonetta Salvestroni

The Science-Fiction Films of Andrei Tarkovsky¹

Translated and Edited by RMP

Andrei Tarkovsky's SF films, *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1980), have precise and creative affinities with the fantastic strain in Russian and Soviet literature. The metaphoric interactions, the bipolarities, the relationships with an Otherness at once external to and inside the characters, the anticipation of ambiguous miracles, and the sense of being on the "threshold," that we meet with in Bulgakov, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and the Strugatskys we also encounter in Tarkovsky.² There is, however, a difference. The "magical role" assumed by the word in Gogol's Petersburg tales³ or in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, say, Tarkovsky transfers to the image, which he endows with a power not inferior to that of the word. It is within the power of the image to surmount spatial, temporal, and biological barriers, materialize memories and psychic realities, and bring alien places near and humanize them to the point that they come to life and participate in an extra-verbal communicatory relationship.

In Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, the dialogue between humankind and the planet transpires exclusively through images, and so finally does that between the director and his public, along with the process whereby Harey—an adult alien but at the start devoid of consciousness—becomes humanized. The Soviet director's first film thus exemplifies, in an original and complex way, the manner in which the image communicates and contributes to the development of cognition.⁴

Typifying all of Tarkovsky's films to date, from *The Childhood of Ivan* (1962) to *Nostalgia* (1983), is a binary spatial organization. Each sets a quotidian world, grey, monological, and violent, against an anti-world which is dynamic, malleable, and full of color, the dominion of possibility and of choice. In his 1962 film, the luminous dimension of the dream and of memory presents a stark antithesis to the tragic greyness of the war, which one of the characters defines as the suspension of the vital flux and of communication. A similar antinomy is implicit throughout Tarkovsky's next film, *Andrei Rublev* (1966). This immediately becomes evident to the viewer towards the end, when the black-and-white footage reserved for a Medieval Russia devastated by pillagings, acts of repression, and massacres gives way to the colors of the final frames dedicated to the vital force of art and of a nature uncontaminated by violence and by the obtuse mechanicalness which human beings, according to Tarkovsky, tend to be guilty of. After

the scenes of ruinous incursions by enemies, of the tortures which the authorities inflict on the Russian people, and of the blinding and killing of artists at the behest of princes to prevent them from beautifying the palaces of rivals, there finally appear on the screen images of another world: that of Rublev's icons and then of the living water of a rainfall and of a great river traversing grassy expanses where horses move in natural freedom. Relating the two spheres is a matter entrusted to the film's addressees or, in *The Childhood*, implicitly to Ivan, who contemporaneously inhabits both dimensions and whose point of view the spectator gathers from images culled from his thoughts and sense perceptions.

While repeating this binary structure, *Solaris* introduces a substantial element of difference. There the dialogue between world and anti-world undergoes a concrete materialization inasmuch as one of the direct, first-person interlocutors, thanks to its peculiarities, is the planet itself. It is here that the originality of Tarkovsky's spatial treatment of Lem's materials manifests itself: in the director's metamorphosing of an animate space—or rather, the living planet inhabiting it—as one of the protagonists of the cinematic text. The other partner to the dialogue is, of course, Kris Kelvin, who has been given the assignment of investigating certain strange happenings at the Solaris space station and of deciding on the basis of his findings whether to destroy the alien entity or try to establish contact with it.

As in *The Diary of a Madman* or *The Master and Margarita*, the film *Solaris* centers upon a problematic communicative relationship—one which, in its context, is perilously beyond normal bounds. No less than the fictive worlds of Gogol and Bulgakov, the terrestrial society of the future as Tarkovsky envisions it—which has similarities to what was actually his own—is characterized finally by its rigid organization. Founded on the premise that truth is univocal, this social order refuses to accept diversity, which it proceeds to destroy whenever it becomes too prominent to be ignored. This is exactly the parabolic meaning connected with the Earth in its relations with Solaris—an import first instanced in the dogmatic refusal of scientists to verify the testimony of the astronaut Berton, and then in the wish to bombard the planet once the goings on at the space station prove to be too disquieting.

It is significant that Tarkovsky decided to have his film begin on Earth, thereby departing from Lem's fiction, which from its opening page immediately situates the human actors in the vicinity of Solaris. While thus focussing on the social system of the future, however, the director offers information about it only indirectly. It is up to the viewer to infer its characteristics: from the inquest concerning Berton's declarations; from the uninterrupted file of automobiles that appear to whirl by endlessly, thus metaphorically representing the mechanical world which Burton returns to after his stay at the home of Kris's father; and from the posturings of Sartorius, that bureaucrat of science, who holds it a duty to annihilate whatever does not correspond to its objective laws, which admit of nothing beyond themselves. Revealing itself obliquely, the Earth of the future emerges from a singular process involving not only the future expressly imaged in the film but also Tarkovsky's own present, Soviet reality in the 1970s.

His *Solaris* begins and ends with the scene of the house which Kris's father has built, in opposition to the purely technological developments of his time, to be in contact with a living and unmechanized nature. As the father himself underscores, he has designed the building so that its structure recreates that of his grandfather's house—a project that required research into his own roots on the land and in his familial past. Here the director also resorts to other images reinforcing that metaphoric significance: of a lake whose living waters exhibit a concentric movement complicated by a rainfall, and of a horse trotting freely in a manner reminiscent of the final frames of *Andrei Rublev*.

Old man Kelvin, then, lives an anomalous life with respect to the rest of the world; and by comparison with a son profoundly incapable of understanding him, he (along with Berton) vindicates *Solaris*'s right to exist. (As he asserts, it should not be suppressed merely because it is different.) The father's dimension accordingly adds a third point of view to the dialogue between antinomial opposites which otherwise dominate this work of Tarkovsky's as they do his preceding films. Old Kelvin's point of view assumes a basically mediatory function, making fruitful on Earth young Kelvin's experience of two unknown dimensions: one cosmically distant and embodied in the ocean-planet; the other, nearer but no less accessible, constituted by the depths of his psyche.

The anti-world of *Solaris* is disturbing to terrestrial minds because as a living entity, it invalidates the fixed laws and rules to which they are mechanically accustomed, standing at once outside and within the purview of such. This double valence, which scientists find logically unacceptable, has its correlative in their confrontations with the planet, in regard to which they are both hosts and guests. Their space station orbits above the waters of *Solaris*, but that thinking magmatic mass at the same time enters into them, insinuating itself into their minds as they sleep. From this position, the planet conducts its attempts to communicate with them, taking on a role analogous to, but more powerful than, that of the Unconscious. It does not limit itself to transmitting mental messages; it also succeeds in materializing them.

At this point it begins to become clear that the true center of the anti-world of limitless possibility which the three scientist-astronauts are exploring is not external, but instead lies inside them, in depths that terrestrial experience, confining as it is, has never allowed them to reach. The dialogue with the alien from here on transforms itself into an auto-communicative relationship, doubly parlous from the standpoint of any cultural code of earthly provenance. Indeed, it compels human beings to come to terms with a Difference which can neither be distanced nor evaded.

Tarkovsky and Lem, no doubt influenced by Freud, have endowed *Solaris* with a "symmetrical" logic, one capable of nullifying spatio-temporal distances along with the distinctions between life and death, part and whole, thinking and being.⁵ A homogeneous mass with the capacity for enveloping everything, the planet generates the monstrous midgets that populate Sartorius's Unconscious, for example, as well as reproducing the obsessive mental picture that Kris has of Harey, down to the mark of the injection she took to kill herself ten years earlier.

For this explosion from the Unconscious, which the monological and dogmatic Earth of the future would condemn to non-existence, the scientist-astronauts are quite unprepared; and that makes their dialogue with the Alien difficult, tense, even on the subjective level. In what is perhaps the most tragic case, the fear and shame that Gibarian discovers in himself are strong enough to drive him to suicide. On the other hand, the tendency towards violence that seizes the bureaucrat Sartorius seeks (though only apparently) an external outlet: the single means he determines on for getting free of and annihilating the most obscure and unsupportable part of himself is to destroy the planet. Nor does Kelvin, for all his specialist training in social psychology, prove to have brought totally adequate intellectual equipment from Earth. His first response, like that of his fellows, amounts to an act of rejection: he endeavors to do away with the new Harey, the disquieting material message which the planet has sent him; and he thus accomplishes the cruel deed for which in the past he was only indirectly responsible.

Even so, troubled as he is in his monological certainty about contact with the dimension his father inhabits, Kris is the one personage in the film capable of an evolution which concludes with the hard-won recovery of his human integrity. Towards that end, his alien companion takes on the same function that the anti-world has for the viewer: that of a model interaction with the primary field of investigation—in this instance, of the memory-object which was the terrestrial Harey—thereby assisting to bring to consciousness new realizations, new connections (cp. Black). Rendering this interaction productive is the fact that the model, though apparently identical to her original, lacks knowledge and memory—an adult just come into the world and therefore resembling an infant of extraordinary plasticity.

Traditional logic alone is of no use for comprehending the film and in particular *Solaris's* messages. Here the key to interpretation is the same principle of "symmetry" that governs the Unconscious, including dreams and emotions. With that idea in view, we can observe that Harey, Kris, and *Solaris* are autonomous beings, distinct from one another, *and* at the same time elements in which the part is identical to the whole. Thus Kelvin is a temporary visitor to a planet "out there" which is also his Unconscious, a part of himself. So, too, Harey, something external which he finds in his room upon awakening, at the same time is a part of him, a reproduction of the image stored in his mind, rather than a totally independent creature.

As a result of the collaboration between Kelvin and *Solaris*, Harey constitutes for them a point of encounter, of contact, a materialized message which man and planet alike participate in as senders and intended addressees. Thanks to its peculiarities, the "text" that they produce together can inform each of them about the partner. Harey brings together the human traits derived from Kris's memory of his woman and an Otherness she shares with *Solaris* (evinced by the fact that her cells are of a type unknown to Kelvin and his colleagues).

One of the most important moments of *Solaris*—the moment in which the potentialities and ductility of the language of images reach their apex—is when Harey, a materialized image and at the same time a message result-

ing from the iconic exchange between Kris and Solaris, in turn develops an interactive process, using images that she visually perceives.

Typical of Tarkovsky's films is an insistent use of quotations: verbal ones (of the sort which we shall consider in regard to his next work, *Stalker*), but also—and above all—visual ones. In *Solaris* there are the copies of famous paintings, hanging on the walls of the space station and repeatedly focussed on, and three film inserts: the one documenting the Berton inquest; the audio-visual message which Gibarian records before his suicide for Kelvin's benefit; and the short of Kris as a child filmed by his father. The interpolation of these three makes for an implicit and suggestive parallel between the magical operations of Solaris and the possibilities which the cinema holds out for human beings. Like the products of the Unconscious materialized by the planet, the three film sequences bring the remote near and cause the past and even the dead to return (Gibarian, Kris's mother, the dog Kris had as a child).

These iconic moments make for the kind of dialectical interaction which goes along with intertextuality. The situation of intertextuality, as Juri Lotman points out (p. 10), carries with it an "awakening of the text" and "a sense of the multiplying of meanings."

In Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, the most important of these moments concerns the short dealing with Kris's childhood (the only sequence among the three mentioned filmed in color). It works on a double level. As we shall see, it initiates in Harey the process by which she moves towards knowledge and humanization. At the same time, it has an indirect effect on Kris, who, thanks to her progress, modifies his vision of reality, a vision which he discovers to be penurious and dogmatic.

The only moving images that Harey observes on the screen as the short is being shown are the leaping, warm, red flames of a fire around which Kris's family is gathered in a snow-covered winter landscape. It is after viewing this footage that she regards the reproduction of Pieter Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow* with intense concentration. It has hitherto frequently figured in the confines of the space station; but, as she attends to it now for the first time, it assumes for her a polyvalent significance, which Tarkovsky forcefully brings home through a synthesis of images.

Certain comments that Ludwig Wittgenstein makes about visual perceptions prove to be especially helpful in explaining this peculiar, indeed unique, operation which takes place in Tarkovsky's film. The peculiarity lies in the fact that the author of the operation is an extraterrestrial possessing the natural language and cognitive capacities of an adult, but devoid of worldly experiences. The Austrian philosopher writes: "I contemplate a face and suddenly notice its likeness to another. I see that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience 'noticing an aspect'" (*Philosophical Investigations*, p. 193e [II. xi]). And again: "I meet someone whom I have not seen in years. I see him clearly; but fail to know him. Suddenly I know him, I see the old face in the altered one. I believe that I should do a different portrait of him now if I could paint" (*ibid.*, p. 197e [II. xi]).

This process exactly applies to Harey's case in regard to *Hunters in the Snow*. She notices the element which the painting has in common with the

short she has viewed—snow—and this triggers an associative process that permits her to see the Bruegel in a different aspect. Here she is in the same position as the viewer of *Solaris* confronted with the phenomenon constituted by the planet's magmatic mass: faced with an image novel to her, she isolates certain of its properties, associates them with other images, and at the same time synthesizes their shared details so that they clarify and illuminate one another. Through the eye of the camera, which follows Harey's line of vision, the viewer sees on the screen segmented images of Bruegel's painting and footage from the short about Kris's childhood.

Unlike the latter's iconic message, the Bruegel, with its grey tonalities and its icy greens and whites, transmits a sense of cold, of solitude, of incommunicability. We see on the screen hunters (and their dogs), lugubrious and dark, men for whom the violent impulse which killing presupposes has nothing to do with a will to live, is not dictated by the necessity for survival; rather, they seem enclosed in an armor of ice which prevents contact with or comprehension of the Other. This central subject of the painting thus has a connection to Harey's own case: it relates to her impending dissolution in Sartorius's annihilator as victim of a cold ferocity that she obscurely senses but does not understand.

It is in this way that the "quotation" of Bruegel brings home to the viewer certain secondary meanings not evident in the painting by itself. Even more important, however, is the function that the painting has for Harey. Not only does it offer her a means (as the short does as well) of approaching a world and a past not her own. The use of a model, in this case the short on Kris's childhood, also allows her to connect the painting's message with her situation as victim and prey. At the same time, it permits her to organize a series of impressions and intuitions hitherto left without a unifying center (e.g., Kris's tender attitude and Sartorius's fixed destructive resolve).

The result of this process—silent only in the sense that it is not verbalized—is the resolution expressed in her explosive attack on the bureaucrat Sartorius. This is the desperate protest of a being who senses that day by day she is becoming more and more human, but, like the planet that sent her, sees her right to live about to be abrogated in the name of the kind of science which upholds its dogmatic stasis by destroying the Alien.

The birth and death of Harey form part of the message that the planet transmits for the exclusive benefit of Kelvin. She is the living model which causes him to become aware of the obtuse and mechanical cruelty dominant in the world from which he originates. Yet the "cruel miracle" he passively awaits after losing a being whom he loved despite her Difference is not her resurrection, possible though that would be in this dimension. Instead, it is the unexpected materialization of another mental image, equivalent to the Unconscious because transmitting, through displacement, an analogous message.

This second, and again imperfect, model which the planet sends—and which Kris is able to decipher immediately—brings the viewer back to the initial scene of the film. As we look at what seems to be the water of the lake of the opening frames (it exhibits the same concentric movement), the camera slowly draws distant so that we perceive that what we are now see-

ing is an aquatic island, enveloped in its turn by the waters of Solaris, and on the island, old Kelvin's house drenched inside and out. The subsequent embrace between men from two generations is an event occurring far from Earth, on the space station, as the materialization of Kris's mental image; and this signals his acceptance of an Otherness less fantastic than Harey or the planet, though one that would have been incomprehensible to Kris before his extraordinary double experience.

This synthetic and polysemous final image has not been understood by those who claim that it represents "a submission to authority and to traditional social institutions" or "the archetype of power, the father figure," "a dour entity wrapped up in his logic of conservatism."⁶ Instead, the image's meaning is twofold, oscillating between the necessity of entrusting oneself to reassuring superior entities capable of performing miracles and the opening of a new vision of the world, a vision which discovers the richness of a reality full of possibilities. This ambivalence, central to the work of Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Bulgakov, and the Strugatskys,⁷ is what Tarkovsky recaptures in his film. The Soviet director apparently recovers both poles, utilizing one to the advantage of the other. His protagonist, through the planet's "cruel miracles" and the temporary escape into a "symmetrical" way of seeing which releases him from his too confining existential condition, projects himself towards a dynamic future in which there are no static and absolute verities.

Thanks to the film's artistic multidimensionality, the voyage embracing at once the cosmos and psychic reality is open to different interpretations. If Solaris is both a thinking planet and Kelvin's Unconscious, and if his dialogue with it is thus also a self-communication, then he is at once the intended addressee of a miracle and the active protagonist of a search beginning in the depths of his being but finally, once the dialogue gets under way, leading also to the Other. In this regard, it is significant that Kelvin is able to attain the infinite and creative potential hidden in himself only with the help of a fantastic and miraculous entity beyond him which compels him to establish with it a contact which he was not prepared for in advance.

Compared to *Solaris*, Tarkovsky's next film, freely adapted from the Strugatskys' *Roadside Picnic*, appears decidedly pessimistic. Absent from it is the kind of autonomous development which the preceding film represents as difficult, but not impossible—witness, for example, the independence that Kris's father attains.

Fundamental to the 1980 film is a complex interaction which amounts to what might be called the "*Solaris*-ation" of *Picnic*, and whose operation begins at the level of the scenario composed by a Tarkovsky who is the active and creative recipient of both books (i.e., Lem's and the Strugatskys'). *Stalker* resembles the Soviet director's version of *Solaris* in proposing a voyage into an animate space at once external and internal to the protagonist and modifiable according to his state of mind.⁸ That enterprise in this instance is not, however, imposed upon the characters, forced willy-nilly to come to terms with themselves; rather, it is an adventure desperately sought, yet useless; for no contact is established with the Alien and the world remains "a prison" governed by "iron laws" which "cannot be violated."⁹

In considering *Stalker*, we can distinguish various phases of the film's conception. In the first, the director has utilized Lem's *Solaris* as a "subsidiary subject" or as a filter through which to see his main subject: the Strugatskys' novel serving as his point of departure. Thanks to the process of intertextual connection that Tarkovsky as Lem's and the Strugatskys' addressee performs, the technological treasures which in *Picnic* were retrieved from the Zone do not figure in the film's scenario. Nor do the black market, Red's weight of guilt, or the episode wherein Pilman explains his vision of the world along with the extraterrestrial mysteries. Furthermore, the eight years of the novel Tarkovsky compresses into a single day, one which has a double and antinomial valence: as the brief and decisive moment of the miracle which is simultaneously one of daily mechanical routine. The 24 hours lived by the Stalker are not fundamentally different from countless others repeatedly spent waiting-searching for something which never will happen. Then, too, the film deviates from *Picnic* (and also from Lem's *Solaris*) in regard to the status of the Alien; for as Tarkovsky himself stresses (pp. 48-51), it cannot certainly be concluded from *Stalker* that something actually can happen in the Zone—i.e., that the protagonist does not imagine everything.

For all its departures from the Strugatskys' book, the film nevertheless centers upon and reorganizes the last episode of *Picnic*, the one wherein Red, desperate over his daughter's illness, goes in search of the legendary Golden Ball, which according to rumor can grant everyone's deepest wishes. The Zone conceived by the Strugatskys impels introspection, just as *Solaris* does; and it is on this point which the Polish and Russian stories have in common that Tarkovsky concentrates *Stalker* (after abandoning a version "more faithful to *Picnic*" because he found it unsatisfying).¹⁰

In the second phase of the film's conception, Tarkovsky draws not only upon Lem and the Strugatskys but also on passages from Dostoyevsky, Tjutehev, Lao Tze, the Gospels, and the Book of Revelation, all of which act as filters or magnifying lenses capable of bringing out new meanings and discoveries. With reference to Max Black's suggestive metaphor (see his p. 41), we can say that in *Stalker* it is as if "the night sky," or the field of reality, were observed by Tarkovsky—and through him by viewers of his film—not with the naked eye directly but "through a piece of heavily smoked glass on which certain lines have been left clear." Thereby one "shall see only the stars that can be made to lie on the lines previously prepared upon the screen, and the stars...[one] do[es] see will be seen as organized by the screen's structure." Everything else is immediately eliminated.

The Stalker of the film, thanks to an interactive process within the film itself, is transformed from the simple and weak character whom the Strugatskys portray as attracted to adventure and lucre into a "ridiculous man." In his desire to escape from his existential prison, he is akin to Gogol's Poprishchin, to certain of Dostoyevsky's male personages, and in some ways to Bulgakov's Master. As his wife, addressing herself to the camera and thence to the spectators, says of the Stalker:

Probably you have already understood that he is not normal. Everybody laughed at him and he was so lost, the poor thing....But what could I do? I was sure I would have been okay with him. I knew there would be some bitter

moments, but a bitter happiness is better than...a grey, boring life....And if there weren't any suffering in our life, it wouldn't be better; it would be worse. Because then there wouldn't be any happiness either, and there wouldn't be hope even.... (*Stalker*, p. 53)

What *Stalker's* protagonist has in common with the Russian tradition of the fantastic in its Gogol-Dostoyevskian strain is his location at the margin of a rigid and ossified system, in a no man's land susceptible to centrifugal violent forces. Here a strong pressure against automatization exerts itself on the Stalker, also in the person of his wife. By her reflections on suffering, she articulates that impulse of a dialectic of opposites towards breaking the monotony of a mechanical and grey existence, an impulse previously given voice by the devil who is Ivan Karamazov's alter ego and then by Bulgakov's Woland.

The apparent alternative that presents itself in the face of the Stalker's despair is between an escape into a thaumaturgic dimension wherein to await an unforeseen resolute event and an act of faith in the human possibilities hidden in the depths of one's being. In *Stalker*, however, the weight of everyday life is so crushing as to preclude that alternative. The threshold of the room where the protagonist believes the most secret desires can be fulfilled will not be crossed, and will not because no one dares confront the double risk that crossing it involves. If the miracle does not transpire, there will be nothing to believe in or hope for any longer. If, on the other hand, entering the room means acceding to the darkest part of oneself, the peril is of not being able to bear the shame of what one discovers.

In contrast to the Stalker's attitude, the reactions of the two intellectuals for whom he is supposed to act as guide—uncreative bureaucrats of science and literature—recapitulate the behavior of certain characters in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. Like the Sartorius of that film, the scientist in *Stalker* wants to bomb out of existence an Otherness which does not fit the laws of his system. The writer, instead—who is closer to Gibarian—draws back so as “not to pour on anyone's head the loathing he has within,” whereupon he would have “to put his head in a noose” (*Stalker*, p. 50).

The Stalker, meanwhile, deprived of the possibilities allowed Kris Kelvin, restricts himself to dreaming of the Apocalypse and of a regeneration for which he would be not the architect but the Christ-like mediator;¹¹ yet he cannot find within himself the courage to believe in this dream completely.

Still, one possibility remains open in the film. Its indicator is a passage from Lao Tze on the plasticity and flexibility of children. As Tarkovsky cites it in the *Stalker* filmscript (p. 37), that quotation runs as follows:

People are born weak and flexible; they die strong and obdurate. A growing tree is delicate and flexible; it perishes dry and strong. Rigidity and strength are the companions of death; weakness and elasticity express the freshness of being; what is unrigid will not be vanquished.

That idea, occupying in *Stalker* a place similar to the thought of Pilman's inserted in the middle of *Picnic* and then picked up at the end from Red's point of view, is likewise similarly crucial to understanding—in this case, particularly of the final frames of the film.

There, in a movement whose circularity, though only apparent, is nonetheless reminiscent of *The Childhood of Ivan* and *Solaris*, Tarkovsky ends the film where it began. From the luminous and colorful world of the Zone, we are returned to the squalor of an everyday existence rendered in black-and-white footage shading into tones of brown. Yet if the filthy and bemired village, the stagnant waters of the lake, and the house of the Stalker are essentially the same we see at the outset, they are not exactly so. For now the color footage which Tarkovsky (significantly enough) reserves for the sequences taking place within the Zone, with exception made (equally significantly) only for those moments when the point of view switches from the adults to the Stalker's daughter, Martyška, again briefly comes into play. As the mute and mutant Martyška, deprived of the use of her legs, is carried home on her father's shoulders from the bar where she had been taken to wait for him, we are suddenly and temporarily allowed to see the quotidian world completely transformed through her eyes. The hitherto polluted and dead surface of the lake, shot from above and as the girl sees it, suddenly appears bright and colorful, like the Zone.

The connection made here between Martyška and the lake ties *Stalker* in with Tarkovsky's previous films. It instances once again the "intratextual" association recurrent in the Soviet director's œuvre between images of water and childhood. His conjoining of the two, moreover, has an analogical basis—as he himself hints in his quotation of Lao Tze—which also points to the privileged status of childhood as a sanctuary from the mechanical rigidity of adult life. Hence the expanses of water so insistently present in *The Childhood of Ivan* and *Andrei Rublev* and transforming themselves into an entire living planet in *Solaris* have a metaphoric meaning. They image the elasticity, the inarrestibility, the dynamism which human beings are born with—the potential, also for apprehending the new, which figures in *Stalker*'s last scene.

Following the intervention of black-and-white, the color stock Tarkovsky has employed to shoot the lake from Martyška's point of view reappears. By that medium, we finally witness the long-awaited miracle. It takes place not within the Zone but outside it, in the realization of a wish capable of subduing the "iron laws" that none of the adults has been able to violate. What makes the miracle possible is not a material transference to forbidden territory (viz., the Zone), but the momentary escape into the world of art achieved by Martyška, who though she is, like Harey, an alien, is also a child and hence possesses a child's "elasticity."

In the sequence immediately preceding her "escape"—one of the last in the film—she appears silently absorbed in a book while on the soundtrack a voice, objectivizing her interior monologue, recites a lyric (untitled) by Tyutchev (pp. 59-60):

I love your eyes, my love,
Their wonderful, passionate play
When suddenly you raise them
And boldly cast your glance,
Like skyborn lightning, about you.

But there is a mightier magic:
 Of eyes to earth cast down
 All through a fervent kiss,
 And through the lowered lashes
 The sullen faint flame of desire.

The miracle performed by Martyška's glance, her eyes turned downward like the woman's in the poem, was the realization, through a process of displacement, of a desire which this alien, deprived of the use of her legs, is never able to fulfill otherwise. What she accomplishes by the exertion of mental energy is alone, from the standpoint of the dead mechanical world in which she lives, a prodigious feat, even if the result is equivalent to the effect produced on a glass by the noisy vibrations of a train in an opening scene of the film.

The small miracle that Martyška performs solely for her own benefit makes it clear to the viewer that the Zone is not some magical territory to be physically attained by passing through barbed-wire barriers. Rather, it is something existing everywhere, outside us and within, though this is lost sight of by the adults in *Stalker*, who are prisoners of a shabbily and rigidly one-dimensional world.

The Strugatskys' novel and Tarkovsky's film, though they differ from one another in language and point of view, share the same nucleus. Both problematically address the need to break out of the rigidity and automatism produced by all-encompassing dogmatic certainties and by models pretending to fit all situations. While pointing in somewhat different directions, the two works are thus instructively complementary. *Picnic* projects its search outwards via the indications of a scientist (Pilman) who, rather than seeking unshakable certitudes, wants to construct dynamic hypotheses, ones which can be extended and modified to explain ever new phenomena. Tarkovsky, instead, directs his investigations towards the interior of the individual above all, seeking to discover those uncontainable and infinite possibilities of a "symmetrical" being without which scientific and artistic creativity, and cognitive advances generally, could not occur.

NOTES

1. The foregoing essay represents a translation of a part of the sixth chapter of S. Salvestroni's *Semiotica dell'immaginazione. Dalla letteratura fantastica russa alla fantascienza sovietica* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1984)—RMP.

2. For a discussion of the relationships among these artists, see my book.

3. "Petersburg tales" (or "stories") is a term (which Gogol apparently did not approve of) collectively designating "The Overcoat," *The Diary of a Madman*, "The Nose," "The Nevsky Prospect," and "The Portrait"—RMP.

4. This and other theoretical problems I treat at some length in chapter 6 of my book on the "semiotics of the imagination."

5. Here and subsequently I use the term *symmetrical* (or *symmetry*) in the sense developed by psychologist Ignacio Matte Blanco. For him it names the principle on which the Unconscious's logic is based—the principle according to which

asymmetrical relationships behave as if they were symmetrical. (By logico-mathematical definition, symmetrical relationships are those which hold even when the phenomena or terms related are reversed, whereas asymmetrical relationships do not. Thus, for example, "John is the brother of Paul" formulates a symmetrical relation, "The arm is part of the body" an asymmetrical one.) By consequence of the principle of symmetry, Matte Blanco emphasizes, all the elements of a class come to be considered as identical in a way which annihilates such traditional logical distinctions as that between subject and object, part and whole, thought and action, and past, present, and future. What I mean to suggest, then, is that *Solaris* in effect operates on that principle and hence is explicable in its terms.

6. See Frezzato, pp. 65-70. Soviet critics who discuss *Solaris* do not seem any more open than he to the comprehension of the rich meanings of the film. They affirm that Tarkovsky "did not follow the logic and the spirit of such a good book" as Lem's (quoted from a round-table discussion in *Voprosy Literatury*, no. 1 [1973]).

7. For a further discussion of this bipolarity/ambivalence, see Salvestroni, "The Ambiguous Miracle in Three Novels by the Strugatsky Brothers," SFS, 11 (1984):291-303.

8. "The Zone," the Stalker affirms, "might seem capricious, but it is at any given moment exactly what our state of mind makes it....Some have died on the threshold of the room. However, everything that happens here depends not on the Zone but on ourselves": *Stalker*, p. 36.

9. "The world," the Stalker is told by the Writer, "is infinitely monotonous, and therefore neither telepathy, nor fantoms, nor flying saucers have a place in it....None of that; the world is governed by iron laws, and hence is unbearably boring. And those laws, alas, are not violated, cannot be violated": *Stalker*, p. 26.

10. According to Tarkovsky, the remaking of the film was not wholly a matter of design. After half of the first version had been shot, it was ruined in the lab. "I couldn't do the same thing over again. So, together with the authors, I started rewriting the scenario....The accident took place just when the film in its original conception was in danger of becoming insufficiently profound": "Interview," pp. 48-51.

11. It is here, in connection with the Stalker's Apocalyptic dream, that quotations from the Book of Revelation and the Gospels figure.

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RÉSUMÉ

Simonetta Salvestroni. Les films de science-fiction d'Andrei Tarkovsky. —*Tarkovsky est le metteur en scène soviétique de deux chefs-d'oeuvre de science-fiction: Solaris (1972) tiré du livre du même nom par Stanislaw Lem, et Stalker (1980), adapté du livre des frères Strougatsky, Pique-nique au bord de la route. En se servant surtout de l'image, Tarkovsky organise ces films (comme ses films précédents) autour d'une bipolarité: entre Solaris et l'URSS contemporain (ou, peut-on dire, le monde technologisé) dans l'un; et entre le monde quotidien monochrome, et la Zone merveilleuse et colorée dans l'autre. En même temps cependant qu'il utilise les pôles d'une logique binaire, ses films nient cette logique antinomique car leurs images finales suggèrent un tertium datur, celui qu'on voit dans la maison du père de Kelvin, objet de ce monde qui, néanmoins, trempé de pluies, rappelle Solaris et s'y dissout ensuite. De façon encore plus émouvante, ce qui transpire au moment où le monde mécanique noir et blanc de Stalker apparaît soudain, miraculeusement, comme il est vu par les yeux de la jeune paralytique, Martyška, en couleurs vives, rompant ainsi la division logique entre le monde quotidien et la Zone, et ce que chacun d'eux signifiait. C'est à ces égards surtout que les films de Tarkovsky ont des affinités créatrices avec les visions de Boulgakov, Dostoïevsky, Gogol, et des frères Strougatsky. (RMP)*

Abstract.—*Tarkovsky is the Soviet director responsible for two masterpieces of SF film: Solaris (1972), based on the book of the same title by Lem, and Stalker (1980), adapted from the Strugatsky brothers' Roadside Picnic. Working primarily in terms of images, Tarkovsky organizes these films (like his previous ones) around a bipolarity: between Solaris and the contemporary USSR (or, more broadly, the technologized world) in the one film; between the monochromatic quotidian world and the colorful, marvelous Zone in the other. But while taking the polarities of a binary logic as his starting point, his films finally negate that antinomial logic as their concluding images indicate a tertium datur: that figured in the house of Kelvin's father, an object of this world which nevertheless, drenched by rains, recalls (and then dissolves into) Solaris; and perhaps most movingly, that which transpires at the moment when the black-and-white mechanical world of Stalker, suddenly, miraculously, appears, as seen through the eyes of the paralytic girl Martyška, in vivid color, thus breaking down the neat logical division between the everyday world and the Zone and what each of them had stood for. It is in these respects especially that Tarkovsky's films have creative affinities with the fantastic strain in Russian and Soviet literature, with the visions of Bulgakov, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and the Strugatskys. (RMP)*

Paul Coates

Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine

1. Time Travel at the *fin de siècle*. The emergence of time travel as a literary theme at the end of the 19th century is a phenomenon one may suspect to be linked to the simultaneous emergence of cinema, with its capacity to manipulate the illusion of time. It also appears connected with two other phenomena: the growing acceptance of the idea of evolution and the rapid expansion in knowledge of the sheer size of the universe. In the work of H.G. Wells, who deemed evolutionary theory the formative influence upon his world-view, the motif of time travel intertwines with that of utopia: time travel is fuelled by a hope that it will enable one to miss out a stage or two of the evolutionary process and take a short-cut into the future. Wells was to propose in *A Modern Utopia* the idea of a kinetic, rather than a static, utopia. The acceptance of evolutionary theory in Wells's culture finally exploded the notion of the 6,000-year universe, transforming time into a vast field to be mapped and colonized, creating—in a sense—a domain for colonial enterprise once all the available space in the world had been taken up. The spreading knowledge of the extent of the universe, in its turn, rendered it apparent that a great deal of time is required to cross it. To move with reasonable speed from one world to another (eliminating the dead time of the black intervening space, as in the shots, which never last very long, of spaceships moving between planets in SF films while the space travellers often sleep out the time between solar systems—thereby justifying the text's omission of this time too) is in essence to travel through time, traversing light-years of distance.

The notion of the possibility of time travel begins to be formulated as the development of the cultures of *this* world becomes increasingly uneven. Although the late 19th century experiences the cementing of the unity of the world economy, it is in fact a period of continental drift in the technological sphere: cultures drift apart, as some become "advanced"—and hence qualified for the role of "master" and "Superman"—whilst others become "backward" and so are slated for servitude. Travel in time is in a sense travel between the unevenly developed countries of this world mapped onto the space of the universe. Hence in the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), the other civilization drawn to Earth by the fear that the world's inhabitants may abuse the rudimentary form of nuclear power they have just discovered is defined as more "advanced" than ours. Here we see one of the consolatory functions of time travel in SF at work: it domesticates a feared future, dispelling our terror at the possible consequences of technological change by

demonstrating that its denizens (the visiting aliens) either look just like ourselves or—if not—feel as we do. This is the rational and rationalizing version. We see the future and—yes, it works. The horror future-fiction film, by way of contrast (as practiced, for instance, by David Cronenberg), exploits our deep-seated dread that the time that has witnessed so many profound evolutionary changes may conclude by generating another species out of humankind—Foucault's "death of man" with a vengeance. It was this fear, of course, that prompted Butler's Erewhonians to destroy all their machines.

The idea of time travel in the *fin de siècle* period is not restricted to SF, however. It is the motive force of Proust's mammoth work, whilst the resemblances between *The Time Machine* and *Heart of Darkness* are less the fruit of the acquaintanceship of their authors than of the murmurings of the ideology of the era, for which "the fourth dimension" had assumed the status of a cliché. The structure of Conrad's work replicates that of Wells's, and shows the difficulty of disentangling "high" and "low" culture during this period: both show a journey into another culture that is also another time. Kurtz has revealed to Marlow the possibility of regression from "civilization" to "savagery"—i.e., of the movement in time from a "higher" stage of evolution to a "lower" one. The other country stands for another time—again the theme of uneven development.

It is Wells's awareness of the human cost of innovation that gives his work its power. The Time Traveller mounts his machine for the first time in the mood of a suicide readying himself for his demise. The subsequent description of the actual process of movement through time—the nausea, the cinematic time-lapse effects, as day and night blur into greyness—is one of the most remarkable passages in this remarkable story. With all the aplomb of the realist novelist, Wells scrupulously considers the obstacles the Time Traveller will have to surmount. How, for instance, is he to pass through the different solid objects that will arise upon the space he now occupies but cannot reserve for himself at a future time? Time travel itself becomes a form of Russian roulette; to halt may be to encounter the object that will annihilate one. A Bergsonian might applaud Wells's solution—the thinning out of matter at high speed, he says, renders the Time Traveller invisible and invulnerable—whilst decrying as a petrification of the movement of time his readiness to drop his traveller off in the future and stage a drama there. One has to admit the extreme fortune of the Time Traveller in landing in a conveniently empty space. So long as he moves, however, he can slip through matter with the ease of a ghost (ghosts being, after all, the prototypical time travellers): he is himself the laser-beam of time. Hence Wells's Time Traveller and his Invisible Man are related figures: for as long as he travels, the Time Traveller *is* the invisible man (for we cannot see time). Is it coincidental that Wells presents the image-movement (to use Deleuze's term) of time travel as that of a man dissolving against the solid background of the present during an era in which cinema, with its capacity to superimpose and dissolve forms, was coming into being?

The Time Traveller and the Invisible Man are intimate relations, for their attributes are those of the viewer of a film. The great Polish film theorist

of the inter-war period, Karol Irzykowski, wrote of an innate human desire to view events in abstraction from the moment of their first experience, and applied this idea to cinema. Thus the viewing of an event in a cinematic auditorium, whose darkness renders one an invisible man, becomes a species of time travel. (Obviously so, for the events appearing on the screen are not occurring at present but have long been "in the can.") Leaps backward or forward in time involve a syncopation of history that closely resembles the mechanism of cinematic cutting: the intervening events are edited out. The events left out by time travel—as one fast-forwards the film of actuality on the editing table of history—blur into invisibility and end up, as it were, on the cutting room floor. This invisibility is of course a *fin de siècle* theme and even *epistemè*. It is in part the consequence of the convergence of multiple forms of alienation; the artist begins to feel invisible to his or her audience, as the shared conventions linking her or him to a public of peers are broken down by the growth and unpredictability of the new mass audience—the fruit of the spread of literacy and the mass circulation newspapers. Invisibility, however, is not simply a sign of alienation; it also has a utopian meaning. Here it is related to the idea of time travel as metamorphosis: a travelling backwards down the evolutionary scale towards the blessed irresponsibility of the animals. Or of children, who should be seen rather than heard—but preferably not even seen. The look of the moviegoer—as Walker Percy notes in his book of that title—is like that of "a boy who has come into this place with his father or brother and so is given leave to see without being seen." This boy is the child taken out on Sunday to watch the planes from the observation platform in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*: a boy who will emerge from his invisibility through the identification with the on-screen figure, who is always *seen*; a boy who will thus come in the end to share the exemplary death of that seen figure.

2. The Haunting of Time: *La Jetée*. The more time passes, the more *La Jetée* (1962) grows in stature, acquiring a resonance its mere 29 minutes would hardly lead one to expect. It is worth the revisiting that gives it its theme and structure, as it evokes a world in which everything (including one's own death) has always already happened. Here, as in Proust, the precondition of time travel is revealed to be the end of time (the sense of the *fin de siècle*): the protagonist has pre-experienced his own death; or, rather, the entire film can be seen as the unfolding of the contents of the moment of death, in which memory ranges through time in search of a way out of the present moment of imminent demise, only to return—having failed—to that deferred moment (just as the whole of Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poète* [1930] occurs whilst the chimney falls). The central figure is a revenant, a discarnate spirit moving towards the embodiment of his own past. He has been pursued by a vision of the enigmatic face of a woman and the image of a man falling nearby, at Orly airport. Only at the end of the film, which is also the end of his life, does he discover this primal scene to be that of his own death, that he is the man falling.

La Jetée begins with the world devastated by World War III. An oracular, poetic voice-over that derives from Cocteau (as does some of the film's

imagery—for instance, the defaced heads of the classical statues) recounts events. And so seldom is this great film shown—its brevity and its unusual aesthetic strategies providing the distribution networks with an alibi for its scandalous marginalization—that it may be helpful to begin by summarizing these events.

After World War III, the radioactivity on Earth's surface is so intense that the survivors have had to retreat underground. Marker sardonically notes the fruits of victory: "the victors mounted guard over an empire of rats." The survivors fall into two groups: experimenters and experimentees. The first experiments prove unsuccessful; their subjects either die or go mad. Their purpose will later be explained to the protagonist by the director of the camp, who is not the expected mad scientist but a man who gently explains that humanity has been cut off from space and its only hope of survival lies in time (the new domain of the colonial enterprise): if a hole can be found in time, then the present will be able to import the necessary resources from the past and future. The death of space in the present is reflected in the way Marker builds up his film (or "photoroman," to use his own term): by a succession of still photographs.

Following the initial disappointments with randomly chosen subjects, the experimenters concentrate upon subjects capable of conceiving strong mental images. "The camp police spied even on dreams," Marker notes: they select the nameless protagonist as their subject because of his obsession with a childhood image. It is their manipulation that ferries him into the past; since they use injections, it is almost as if Marker is implying that the artificial heightening of the senses by cinema is also a drug, against whose effects he practices therapeutic sensory deprivation, reducing film to its origin in a series of stills in black-and-white.

On the tenth day of the experiment, images begin to materialize: "a bedroom in peacetime—a real bedroom," for example. The insistence on the reality of these things paradoxically draws attention to their status as *images*. The nameless subject—his namelessness a metaphor for the damage consciousness has suffered, but also a means of easing our identification with him, since we too are viewers of images—may see "a happy face" from the past, but it is always "different": no longer reality, only an image; no longer present, but framed as *past*. Other images appear and mingle in what Marker terms "the museum that is perhaps his memory," anticipating the later appearance of the museum as the scene of the last meeting between the protagonist and the image of the girl he pursues into the past. It is as if the museum is simply a materialization of his dreams.

Finally, on day 30, he encounters the girl. The separation of the sexes that could well have been the motive force of the destruction of this world (one sees no women in the underground realm) is briefly abolished. He is sure that he recognizes her; it is indeed the only thing that he is certain of in a world whose physical richness disorients him. She greets him without surprise: reality is always already-known. They come to inhabit an absolute present, "without memories or projects." "Later they are in a garden—he remembers there once were gardens." Again, it is as if they have materialized out of his memory—rather as whole worlds depend on the observer

(*esse est percipi*) in the fiction of Borges. As he watches her face asleep in the sun, he fears that in the course of the time it has taken him to return to her world she may have died. The imperative to annihilate time thus becomes all the more pressing. On about the 50th day they meet in a museum, a place of "eternal creatures."

When he next comes to consciousness in the laboratory, the man is told that he will now be despatched into the future. In his excitement, he fails at first to realize that this means the meeting in the museum has been the final one. "But the future was better protected than the past." He enters it wearing dark glasses, as blind to the future as Oedipus. When he breaks through at last he encounters "a transformed planet," its "ten thousand incomprehensible avenues" embodied in a close-up of the grain of a piece of wood. The people of the future have a dark spot on their foreheads in the position where mystics locate the third eye, an enigmatic echo of the protagonist's dark glasses. At first they reject him as a vestige of the past; they then give him a power supply sufficient to restart the world's industry.

As "the doors of the future close," the man realizes that the completion of his task has rendered him expendable. Fearing liquidation by the experimenters, he responds to a message from the denizens of the future; declining their offer to take him into their society, he asks them to send him back into the past. He does not yet know that in doing so he has chosen death. He arrives on the jetty of Orly airport. As he runs across it, he senses that the child he once was—and with whom the film has begun—must be out there somewhere, watching the planes. Death manifests itself—as so often—as the double, as the self occupies two places and times simultaneously. As he runs towards the woman whose image has obsessed him, he sees a man from the underground camp (wearing the glasses that recur in so many forms in this film, signs of the damage to sight—and cinema—that has reduced everything to stills) and recognizes that "one cannot escape time": he himself was the man he saw fall dead on the jetty as a child.

As the sound of jets rises, echoing the beginning, the film comes full circle, to then continue circling endlessly in the minds of the spectator and of the child the man once was, who is still looking towards a future that has now closed, and of the man himself, always heading towards this future past. At the start of the film, the protagonist had wondered whether he had really seen the image that so obsessed him or had only invented it "to shield himself from the madness to come." The image itself, however, proves to be the madness, and his entry into it the self-splitting of death. It has left him trapped in the labyrinth of time.

At one point the girl whom the time traveller visits in the past terms him "mon spectre" ("my ghost"): like a phantom, he comes from a nameless, distant land. Strictly speaking, he is both a medium (used to gain access to past and future) and a ghost (he haunts—and is haunted by—the scene of his future death; like all of us, he is so habituated to living life in a linear fashion that he can make no sense of the vouchsafed glimpse of the future, which has the opacity of the flash-forward in so many films, of the unheeded prophecies of Cassandra). His insubstantiality is that of a ghost (as Wells has shown, time travel calls for dematerialization—a sign perhaps that it is

only *the mind* that truly travels). It is quite deliberately that I term the film's protagonist a medium: *La Jetée* reestablishes the links between SF and the supernaturalism SF writers so often deny, desirous as they are of colonizing and domesticating the unknown.

The theme of time travel corresponds to the notion of parallel worlds generated by the spiritualism of the late 19th century. In Elizabeth Phelps's enormously influential *The Gates Ajar* (1868), for instance, the temporality of the spirit world runs parallel to that of our own; the absence of the dead became a form of presence. The notion of the parallel world is cemented by the emergence of photography, which sifts the detached surface of one time into another like a card reshuffled in a deck. Thus it is appropriate that Marker's film should be an assemblage of photographs.

Critics writing of *La Jetée* often begin by stating that it is made up entirely of stills. This is *almost* true—for there is one exceptional moment in the film, to which I will return later. The use of still photographs creates a sense that all that remains after the disaster of World War III are the fragments of a narrative. The very form of the film is the imprint of death—rather as the still photographs at the end of Andrzej Munk's *The Passenger* (1963) stand for the director's premature death and inability to complete the film.

In the midst of the sombre succession of stills, however, the image flickers into life for a moment as the eyes of the girl in the past are seen to blink. On occasions Marker has varied the rhythm of his film by dissolving from still to still, rather than simply juxtaposing one baldly with another. Here the dissolves accelerate into normal motion; it is like the mysterious birth of time itself, and can also be compared with Godard's wondering use of stop-motion techniques at points in *Sauve qui peut* (1980). The acceleration indicates the presence of fantasy, of film as animation of the inanimate. As the girl's eyes flicker while she lies in bed (the eyes of the remembered mother, at the child's eye level?), there is a sound as of the dawn chorus, the sound of a world awakening. Then the moment is cut short. The girl's eyes are, as it were, animated by love, her love for the man/child, the love that has transported him into the past. For it is this sense of the possibility of renewed movement, of the flame of life being rekindled out of the universal ashes, that draws the protagonist backwards. The regressive magnet can of course also be seen as Oedipal, the search for the lost love doubling with the quest for the seductive mother, the unity of eros and thanatos; yet this in no way diminishes its poignancy.

La Jetée taps the inherent poignancy of the photograph, that sign of an absent presence, aligning stills in a series as if in the hope that a spark might leap from one to the next and animate all the figures, thereby cheating death; the occasional dissolves are the moments at which such a hope flickers into plausibility. The elegiac quality of this film in black-and-white may well owe something to the threatened status of monochrome itself, about to be generally displaced in European filmmaking when Marker composed *La Jetée*. When the protagonist and the girl in the past walk through a natural history museum, the use of stills generates a piercing irony that is also heart-breaking; there may once have existed a distinction between the skeletons of the extinct animals and the people standing beside them, but

death has rendered them all equally antediluvian: in a photograph (is it of relevance that these are the photographs of a *Frenchman*?) they cease to be "still life" and become "nature morte."

Perhaps the most powerful image in *La Jetée* is the uncanny one of the blindfolded protagonist, electrodes apparently attached to his eye-mask, during the experiments that employ him to break out of the devastated present. The image derives much of its resonance from the manner in which this post-World War III experiment repeats the pattern of the ones conducted in the German concentration camps during World War II (a suggestion reinforced by the German words whispered on the soundtrack). A paradox of great power links the capacity to travel through time with impotence. Time travel becomes an ironic reflection of Marker's own freedom, as he sits at his editing table, to voyage across the surface of images whose originary moments he is not only unable ever to re-enter, but never even inhabited in the first place; for the process of filming them held him at one remove from them. But it also provides an inkling of the utopian possibility of actually reimmersing oneself in the moment when the image was first etched on the negative. The blindfolded time traveller may be likened to the implicit viewer of Buñuel's *Chien Andalou* (1928): to open one's eyes in the cinema is to lose them in actuality. (Buñuel will use the cutter's razor to open our eyes so wide that their contents literally fall out.) When visiting the future, the protagonist wears dark glasses. His damaged vision corresponds to the way the film identifies time less with the visible world of the image-track than with the audible one of the soundtrack: the images may be frozen, but the words one hears are not; the images float upon the soundtrack like ice-floes upon a river.

The time traveller is sent into the past in preparation for his all-important voyage to solicit the technological aid of the future. He himself, however, views the movement into the past as more important: when offered the chance of permanent residence in the future by its inhabitants, he asks to be sent back in time instead—a request that clearly differentiates him from the curious protagonist of most SF, and suggests that Marker would criticize much SF as in thrall to a future-mindedness he deems manipulative in the experimenters.

One could argue that time travel into the past is a motif more emotionally charged than similar travel into the future, which involves a debilitatingly arbitrary speculative projection. Time travel backwards becomes a metaphor for the regressive movement of imagination and desire, for the split-second resurgence of the totality of one's life in the instant of one's death. Time travel here fuses with memory and becomes the herald of death. The life one can traverse instantaneously has already become its own ghost: it no longer offers any of the material resistance of real experience. The circle closes as the past reveals its identity (its simultaneity) with the future. The consequence is the perennial repetition of death.

The time travel that had seemed to offer infinite possibilities is transformed into fate, the dark fulfillment of the oracle of the opening scene. As beginning and end interlock, the open linearity upon which time-travel feeds collapses into a circularity that is strangely satisfying, even as it

entraps us. The satisfaction is of course the aesthetic one of circular form. The trip around the curved universe returns one to base. The fact of imprisonment (the protagonist's—in the camp; our own—in the cinema) finally seeps into the dream of escape, darkening it in the moment of waking. The hope of self-transcendence that fuels time travel crumbles into an illusion.

If Wells's *Time Machine* derives poignancy from its final reference to the Time Traveller's failure to return, *La Jetée* does so from its presentation of return as a tragic recognition of misrecognition. Only in the moment of death does the protagonist know himself; only in the moment of its demise does humanity achieve such self-knowledge. This self-knowledge entails self-destruction, in part because the self one knows is no longer there, but also because it involves the transformation of subject into object required by the science whose consequences (nuclear devastation and experiments on human beings on the one hand; self-transcendence on the other) are considered in the fictional form that is itself impregnated with science (its own antibody, whose lack of empathy it heals with the antidote of identification, whose trappings and air of precision it employs as cryptic coloration for and counterweight to its own anthropomorphism and romanticism): in the *science fiction* so profoundly and pregnantly embodied in *La Jetée*.

RÉSUMÉ

Paul Coates. *Chris Marker et le cinéma, la machine à voyager dans le temps.*—A la fin du siècle dernier, l'apparition du voyage dans le temps était un thème littéraire répandu et faisait partie de la quête de nouveaux espaces à coloniser une fois que le colonialisme avait étendu sa domination sur toute la planète. En quelque sorte, le voyage dans le temps est un voyage entre les pays inégalement développés de ce monde projeté dans l'univers. Wells et Proust ont rêvé, bien que de manière différente, de pénétrer et de dresser la carte de "la quatrième dimension" (un cliché de l'époque) et c'est l'esprit du moment qui a conduit le cinéma à effectuer le voyage dans le temps. Au cinéma, l'homme invisible de Wells s'allie à son voyageur du temps: le spectateur se promène invisiblement à travers les époques. Ceci nous prépare à l'analyse du film de Chris Marker, *La jetée*, qui est probablement la plus puissante incarnation cinématographique du thème du voyage dans le temps. Les subtilités esthétiques du film (par exemple, l'utilisation de photographies) crée un "temps après le temps" dans un monde dévasté par un conflit nucléaire. Il transforme aussi le temps linéaire en temps circulaire; il souligne les préoccupations proustiennes de la mémoire et de l'imagination, de l'absence et de la présence. Il infuse également à la science-fiction un sens du tragique, une sophistication philosophique et même un surnaturel qui fait défaut à la plupart des œuvres du genre. Dans ce film, considéré comme l'un des plus grands films de la science-fiction, le véhicule technique en devient également un spirituel. (PC)

Abstract.—The emergence of time travel as a widespread literary theme in the fin-de-siècle period was part of a search for new areas for colonization once colonialism had completed its domination of all the world's blank spaces. Time travel is

in a sense travel between the unevenly developed countries of this world projected onto the universe. As Wells and Proust dreamed—each in his different way—of entering and mapping “the fourth dimension” (a period cliché), the Zeitgeist generated cinema to effect this time travel. In the cinema, Wells’s invisible man fuses with his time traveller: the film viewer moves invisibly across the ages. All this prepares for an analysis of the film which is perhaps the most powerful cinematic embodiment of the theme of time travel: Chris Marker’s La Jetée. The film’s aesthetic strategies (e.g., the use of stills) create a “time-after-time” in a world devastated by a nuclear war. It also translates linear into circular time; reveals a Proustian concern with memory and imagination, absence and presence; and integrates a sense of tragedy into SF, along with philosophical sophistication and even a supernaturalism often denied mainstream SF works. In one of the greatest of all SF films, the technological medium becomes a spiritualist one also. (PC)

Peter C. Hall and Richard D. Erlich

**Beyond Topeka and Thunderdome:
Variations on the Comic-Romance Pattern in Recent SF Film**

In his *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye describes SF as "a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency to myth" (p. 49). The setting of an SF romance, then, in its more pleasant neighborhoods, would be a kind of technologically wondrous "forest" through which the hero makes his perilous journey to face his crucial struggle. Should the hero be required to traverse a technologically hideous "wasteland," the image will still be, as in more conventional romances, one suggesting social disorder and alienation, a metaphor of sterility. The ideal ending of the SF romance would border on the comic: the marriage of one or more young couples fertilizing the symbolic wasteland, with a new and better world coalescing around them (Frye: 163). An example of the complete form of an SF comic romance may be found in the "Star Wars" trilogy, where Luke Skywalker is successful in his quest and emerges from his struggle with the dark side of himself, to be exalted in a celebration at the end of *Return of the Jedi* that includes the promise of marriage between Han Solo and Princess Leia, a promise sealed in a *komos* ("revel") in a forest as literal and as symbolic as Shakespeare's Arden.

Some SF romances present a wasteland that is emphatically literal and not mostly symbolic or metaphorical: a "blast wasteland" where sterility, social chaos, and alienation are the result of a nuclear holocaust. Such works ordinarily show us the quest of human survivors who either die off (an instance where the romance form tends toward tragedy), or who live on and start rebuilding, an essentially comic-romance pattern. A *komos*, however, seems incongruous in a post-nuclear holocaust wasteland, and filmmakers who have adhered to the conventional mythic pattern have often struggled with the romantic expectations of the comic-romance pattern when depicting a world in which people survive and either retain their culture or establish a post-apocalypse culture.

Two significant instances of this struggle with the comic-romance form may be recognized in the films *A Boy and His Dog* (1975) and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). The structural and thematic similarities of these two films mark them as variations of the comic-romance pattern accommodating the unrelenting grimness of a post-nuclear holocaust setting. In *A Boy and His Dog* there is a constant and deliberate foiling of comic-romance expectations, with the ending of the story placed firmly in the satiric and ironic mode; while in *Beyond Thunderdome*, significant

alterations to traditional mythic patterns are made in an attempt to resolve the tension created by the apparent impossibility of the rejuvenation of the wasteland as against the possibility of a comic-romance conclusion.

The difficulties noted with the comic-romance form in a post-holocaust setting occur in several SF films, and a brief survey will be useful in beginning to understand the significance of the changes wrought in *A Boy and His Dog* and *Beyond Thunderdome*. In the 1950s, the comic-romance form appears as a "New Adam and New Eve" theme in post-apocalypse films like *Five* (1951) and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959). In spite of, or perhaps even because of, impressive scenes of solitary people moving through otherwise deserted cities, these two films suggest in a sentimental way that humankind will continue—even after a nuclear war (see Oglesbee, Martin). The filmmakers here neatly sweep away the rest of humanity, ignoring the probable effects of nuclear blasts and fallout on the flora and fauna as well as the architecture, and leave the romantic couple (or "triple," as in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*) to repopulate the world: a highly improbable and unconsciously upbeat depiction of a nuclear aftermath (see Sagan).

One late-1950s' film seems to respond directly to this difficulty. *On the Beach* (1959) foils the comic-romance expectation by having Ava Gardner wave good-bye as Gregory Peck sails off into the contaminated sunrise in a futile effort to reach home. A contemporary *Time* magazine review describes the film as

a sentimental sort of radiation romance in which the customers are considerably spared any scenes of realistic horror, and are asked instead to accept the movie notion of what is really horrible about the end of the world: boy...does not get girl....Aside from its sentimentality, the worst of the film's offenses is its unreality....The picture actually manages for most of its length to make the most dangerous conceivable situation in human history seem rather silly and science-fictional. (p. 44)

The anonymous *Time* reviewer is essentially correct in the reservations expressed about the film's sense of reality, but seems off the mark in calling the film "silly." The formula "boy does not get girl" is indeed inadequate to express the finality of the film's post-holocaust scenario—both a failure in analysis on the part of *Time*'s reviewer and a failure in the film. Still, the denial of the comic-romance ideal is far from silly: it is an attempt to depict the appalling consequences of nuclear war within the conventional terms of the mode of romance, substituting a linear and terminal vision of human history where a cyclical vision is expected (see Wagar: 33-36). A similar denial of the possibility of a comic rejuvenation may be found in *Testament* (1983) and, somewhat less successfully, in *The Day After* (1983).

Dr Strangelove (1964), while not concerned directly with post-holocaust events, avoids the problems inherent in a comic-romance by treating the subject of nuclear war in the satiric mode. The film suggests that apocalypse is inevitable in a culture dominated by sociopathic expressions of phallic power. The film's "hope" of post-holocaust survival (mineshaft survival-enclaves in which humans and the necessary material for recreating society would wait

out the 100-year doomsday shroud) is made to seem more ludicrous than horrible by General Turgidson's ranting about the possibility of a "mine-shaft gap." Even the most forlorn hope for survival is perverted through the confusion of *eros* and *thanatos* by the men in the War Room. Life in the mineshafts is pictured as an adolescent boy's wet dream of copious sex, and General Turgidson advocates the storage of nuclear weapons in the mineshafts so that the American survivors have a chance at nuclear parity when they emerge. "If this goes on"—if macho mankind continues its strange love for weaponry—then our species is doomed. *Dr Strangelove* achieves that rarity in dramatic satire, the wholly pleasing (aesthetically speaking) conclusion, by showing mankind doing precisely that: "going on" to the utter destruction of the human world.

On the Beach and *Dr Strangelove* clearly show how two filmmakers have tried to deal with the incompatibility of the comic-romance pattern with a post-nuclear war wasteland setting. Both Kramer's deliberate foiling of our comic-romance expectations and Kubrick's solution of shifting the story into the satiric mode prepare the way for *A Boy and His Dog* and *Beyond Thunderdome*.

In *A Boy and His Dog*, Vic roams the blasted wasteland foraging for food and ammunition with the aid of his partner, Blood, a telepathic dog who tutors him in history and language. Beneath the slash-and-grab world of the wasteland, isolated communities preserve remnants of pre-war society. The community known as the Topeka Downunder sends Quilla June Holmes out into the wasteland to lure Vic into the downunder where he will satisfy their need for "a new man" because of infertility among Topeka's male population. Quilla June is refused the seat on Topeka's ruling Committee, power that she thinks she was promised for her aid in the capture of Vic. This denial leads to Quilla June's unsuccessful attempt to stage a coup, trying to use Vic and his fighting skills to support the takeover. Vic rejects the role assigned to him in the coup and returns, with Quilla June following, to the surface wasteland.

The influence of Kubrick's ironic treatment of nuclear apocalypse can be seen in *A Boy and His Dog*, which in many respects begins where *Dr Strangelove* ends. The orgasmic series of mushroom clouds that concludes Kubrick's film creates the world of Vic and Blood in 2024 A.D. Topeka and the other downunders are clearly related to the mineshaft survival enclaves envisioned by the enthusiastic Dr Strangelove; and Vic's delight in Topeka's need for "a new man" for stud service continues Kubrick's satiric undercutting of the stallion-like responses of General Turgidson and President Muffley to Strangelove's suggestion of 10-1 female-to-male ratio in the mineshaft population.

The satire of *A Boy and His Dog* leads to a complete rejection of the possibility of a comic-romance ending. While Vic and Quilla June occupy the structural position in the film to be the romantic couple, it is impossible for a new society to coalesce around them. The authoritarian, suffocating hive society of the Topeka downunder cannot be reconciled with the anarchic, macho life of the surface wasteland (see Dunn-Erllich: 45-48). Topeka can contribute nothing to the re-creation of society on the surface. Instead,

the film ends with the beginning of a new quest romance, as Vic is reunited with Blood on the surface and the two set out in search of the rumored promised land of "over the hill."

The *Mad Max* story begins with *Mad Max* (1979), a post-punk Jacobean revenge tragedy set in a near-future Australia where the social order is crumbling and the police fight crazed drivers and roving highway gangs. Max is a tired and despairing cop, who ultimately wreaks vengeance on the motorcycle gang who murdered his wife and child. In *Mad Max 2* (1981; retitled *The Road Warrior* for US release), the setting is a world that has had its apocalypse, an apparently non-nuclear war that destroyed the world's oil reserves and refining capacity. Max, now a loner on the road, reluctantly finds himself able to aid a small community in its fight to preserve its oil supply from a gang desperate for the precious "juice." The third film, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, begins with Max traveling through the wasteland. He loses all his possessions in an assault by an airborne freebooter, and his search for his vehicle and team leads him to Bartertown, a desert community with the motto, "Helping to Build a Better Tomorrow." There Max becomes the pawn of Auntie Entity in her efforts to consolidate her rule over Bartertown. Exiled to death in the desert "Gulag," Max is rescued by Savannah Nix, a member of a community of youthful survivors of a plane crash at the time of the apocalypse. The children live as hunters and gatherers in a green gorge, waiting for the return of Captain Walker (their pilot), who will lead them to Tomorrow-morrowland, a vision of a technological wonderland that they have created out of memories from before the apocalypse, which in this film is explicitly the result of a nuclear war.

Savannah and the children believe that in Max she has found Captain Walker. Max, however, has no intention of playing savior and tries to keep the children in their green, wet, fertile (though stagnant) womb world. Savannah takes on the hero role and leads a small group out of the gorge. Max follows, rescuing the children from the desert and leading them to the only hope of safety, that "sleazepit," Bartertown. Max and the children kidnap Master, a "little guy" who's "got the knowin' of a lot of things" (including how to produce Power) and escape. They're pursued by Auntie Entity and her motorized troops, but Max manages to get Savannah, the children and Master on a plane that eventually reaches the ruins of Sydney, where Savannah and her group re-establish a civilization, one that offers some hope of getting things *right* this time.

The post-holocaust world of *Beyond Thunderdome* in some ways repeats and extends the vision of the novella and film *A Boy and His Dog*. The visual similarities between the two films alone are enough to suggest parallels (and possibly indebtedness). The wastelands in the two films, the actinic lighting and smoldering fires of the settlement where Vic and Blood see the "beaver flick" and the similar light and fire in Auntie Entity's Bartertown, and the descents into underworlds—all are shared images of survival in ragged and oppressive societies after nuclear war. But where *A Boy and His Dog* ends with a savage undercutting of the comic-romance ideal, *Beyond Thunderdome* handles the problem of achieving a decorous ending through the reshaping of traditional mythic patterns. Structurally, both

films are variants of portions of "The Adventure of the Hero," involving the familiar pattern of descent-containment-reascent (Campbell: 30-40). In *A Boy and His Dog*, Vic, lured by Quilla June, descends into the Topeka Downunder where he is confined in the combination Wedding Chapel and laboratory of the Downunder's artificial insemination project. Vic's reascent marks his transition from unconscious, instinctive motivation to full consciousness. His rejection of Quilla June's manipulative offer of "love" during their flight from the robot guardian Michael shows that he can transcend the animal passions and make a conscious decision (Crow-Erich: 165-66). The decision to save Blood's life by feeding him Quilla June, however, forbids unification of the Surface and Downunder and eliminates hope for fertility.

In *Beyond Thunderdome* the mythic pattern is doubled. Max descends twice, first into Underworld, the methane factory beneath Bartertown, and then into the green gorge. In his descent into Underworld, Max is the tool of Auntie, who makes a deal with him to kill Blaster, the body part of MasterBlaster, and gain control of "the little man" who produces energy for Bartertown. Auntie Entity's use of Max parallels Quilla June Holmes's desire to use Vic as a hired gun for her attempted coup in Topeka. In both instances, the women are dangerous, and it is only when the heroes make their own ethical choices (Max by deciding not to kill Blaster when Blaster is revealed to be a child-like idiot, and Vic by not killing the Committee ruling Topeka) that the threat of the hero's being overwhelmed and rendered ineffectual is removed. Freed from Auntie's control, Max is once more capable of action, and his descent to, containment in, and reascent from the green gorge are more positive experiences than Vic's descent and escape. While Savannah also wants to use Max, it is only in an effort to realize the dream of leaving the gorge and finding Tomorrow-morrowland. The peril of Savannah's exodus from the gorge shakes Max from his lethargy, and he resumes the adventure of the hero. Reascending from the green gorge, Max rescues Savannah and her party in the desert and makes the crucial decision to lead them to Bartertown.

Bartertown is in many respects similar to the "Turf" in *A Boy and His Dog*. Both Bartertown and the Turf provide a place for trade and some semblance of law and order; weapons must be checked in before entering both "towns." They are both improvements over the wasteland, and Auntie Entity's pride in her achievement is justified. But the problem with both Bartertown and the Turf is that they recreate society on the same macho principles that led to the holocaust in the first place. Bartertown is run by a woman, but a woman incarnating Artemis the hunter and Athena the warrior. As in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, these societies will recreate civilization, up to and including the next apocalypse (see Manganiello: 159-60, 165-67).

The alternatives to the Turf and Bartertown (Topeka and the hunter/gatherer society in the green gorge) are both stagnant, little better than cultures in a petri dish. The static society in the green gorge lulls even Max into inactivity, and the "tin can" of the Topeka Downunder preserves a frightening mockery of River City (ca. 1910) from *The Music Man*. *Beyond Thunderdome* acknowledges that there must be a better way than repeating

the old patterns to reestablish society and preserve humankind, and hints how that better way could come about.

It is at the point in *Beyond Thunderdome* where Savannah leads the small party out of the gorge that the reshaping of the traditional mythic pattern begins to take place. Savannah herself had found Max while on some sort of quest that takes her through the wasteland. In bringing Max back to the gorge, she believes she has found for her tribe Captain Walker, the pilot whose promise of eventual return and rescue has taken on religious dimensions for the children. Max's admission, then his insistence, that he is not Captain Walker and would prefer to remain in the green gorge, far from disillusioning Savannah, spurs her on to lead a group out into the wasteland in search of Tomorrow-morrowland. Savannah's belief in Tomorrow-morrowland permits the hopeful ending of the film, since it leads to the re-lighting and promise of rebuilding Sydney. It is one of the few positives in the film's post-apocalypse scenario: superior to Auntie Entity's vision that built Bartertown, and certainly more hopeful than anything in *A Boy and His Dog*. The society created by Savannah and the children in the ruins of Sydney may have a chance of finally establishing a peaceful civilization.

Both Savannah's speech and the images at the end of the film suggest that her tribe has achieved a balance between the green gorge and Bartertown and has built a society that makes central the feminine element so noticeably absent in Bartertown and on the wasteland. In Bartertown, Auntie Entity had orated to a crowd of men, after descending to the Thunderdome like a Moon-goddess—or like Slake later, sliding down into the green gorge on a rope, showing off his status as "First Tracker." At the end of the film, Savannah appears seated on a low platform, holding a baby and passing on to her people the central legend of their tribe; she is not goddess or even matriarch but culture-bearer and mother.

The coalescing of the new society around Savannah suggests that the film is trying to do something new with the hero mythos in response to the previously noted problems inherent in the comic-romance ending for a post-apocalyptic film. The usual expectations of the romance trilogy (as in "Star Wars") suggest that the film might end by marrying off Max to an appropriate female, and there are two likely candidates, Auntie Entity and Savannah Nix. A society with Auntie (Artemis in chainmail) and Max (who resorts to force even in the green gorge) at its center would be ultimately as retrogressive as any created out of a liaison between Vic and Quilla June.

The other possible pairing is, of course, Max and Savannah. But taking part in the comic romance rejuvenation of the wasteland does not seem possible for Max. In *The Road Warrior*, for all that film's similarities to *Shane* (1953), there is never even a hint of the possible domestication of the hero and his possible re-integration into society. Unlike Shane, Max is not attracted to life in the community he aids and there is hardly a hint of romantic interest. Near the end of *Beyond Thunderdome*, Max appears ready to be re-integrated into society. He has the inkling of a "plan" for a better future; by liberating Master from Auntie and getting Savannah and her tribe on their way to Sydney, he actually is helping to build a better tomorrow. But the presence of Max during the rebuilding of a society in Sydney would only

serve to emphasize and inculcate the macho ideals that helped bring about the apocalypse. If there is to be any chance that the cycle can be broken and an end brought to the violence, then, like Shane, Max must remain alone, a heroic Outsider, even though he has rejoined the side of good. The ending is poignant in that Max foregoes—consciously, heroically—his place in the society that his actions help create.¹

The alterations to the traditional mythos in *Beyond Thunderdome* at first appear as an overlaying of two different mythic patterns. For most of the film, *Beyond Thunderdome* is a traditional quest romance in which Max is engaged in a struggle with Auntie, who shows signs of being a “terrible mother” figure. But when Savannah leads her group from the green gorge, the film begins to rearrange the mythic pattern to that of a senex/puer struggle between Auntie and Savannah (see Hillman: 49-61).² Auntie and Savannah struggle to control the knowledge and the power to recreate the worlds for which they have a nostalgic longing. This struggle finds its literal expression in the tug-of-war between the railcars over the possession of Master. Max’s participation in the struggle between Auntie and Savannah is significant; it is he who decides where Master will reside, in Bartertown or Tomorrow-morrowland. In handing over Master to Savannah and rejecting Bartertown, a place where trade and law are only a crude parody of TV game-show culture, Max symbolically rejects the deadening and deadly past and gives the knowledge and the power to shape the future to the youthful dreamer, Savannah.

Shifting the climactic struggle (and the thematic emphasis) from Max to Savannah and Auntie Entity appears to serve two purposes. The first is to keep *Beyond Thunderdome* from merely repeating what has been already achieved in *The Road Warrior*. The second is to allow for an ending that contains some hope without reverting to the comic-romance form; Max must continue alone on the journey of the hero while a new society coalesces around Savannah. For Max to do otherwise would serve to perpetuate the uncritical and dangerous social mythology found in some films, like *Damnation Alley* (1977), where the nuclear aftermath is only a pretext for adventure in an essentially comic-romance form. This kind of survivalist fantasy is merely a recent form of a social mythology, that Northrop Frye suggests in *The Secular Scripture* (p. 170), is “something to be outgrown: it is therapeutic to recognize and reject it.” Such recognition and rejection may be found in films like *Testament*, where the true horror of the nuclear aftermath is recognized, but where the recognition leads only to despair. *Beyond Thunderdome* transcends (without repudiation) such recognition and despair through a re-creation of mythology, a transformation of the myth of regeneration into a self-consistent statement of a highly qualified hope within the Mad Max trilogy.

It is often said that comedy leads toward integration of the protagonist into society and that tragedy leads to isolation (usually the ultimate isolation of death). But if all tragedies end with the protagonist isolated, it does not follow that all works ending in isolation are tragic. *Mad Max* is in form a bloody tragedy in the Jacobean and Caroline fashion, ending with Max walking off alone after having achieved a horrible vengeance: personally

isolated but deeply integrated into the evil of his world. *Road Warrior* ends Shane-fashion, with Max alone but on the side of good. If *Road Warrior* is not tragic (and it emphatically is not), it is because Max's final isolation is that of the Romance hero in full power, ready to go on to other exploits and reconciled to trading community for a life of adventure. *Beyond Thunderdome* moves towards the tragic because Max is *necessarily* isolated if the New and Shining City is to be created. He carries a curse: he is of our generation, the generation that wrought the apocalypse—the ultimate villains of the film. Such a curse may be beyond atonement. But Max is a tragical *hero* because he atones as best he can, showing his willingness to die so that Savannah Nix and the children can escape. He accepts freely the position of *alazon*, and possibly of *pharmakos*—risking death at the hands of Auntie Entity and her horde and sacrificing his chance at Sydney so that Sydney may be rebuilt.

This form of Max's heroism is there in the film, but it may be lost on many viewers, just as much of the satire in *A Boy and His Dog* is lost on many viewers. In that film's condemnation of an evil, sexist world, the only positives are the love of Vic and Blood and the vague rumor of "over the hill," where food grows right out of the ground. Like his younger, racist predecessor, Huck Finn, sexist Vic will light out for the Territories. As Vic moves out beyond Topeka, he is obviously not ready to be re-integrated into society, but at least he has Blood with him, the most human character in the film, if definitely a one-man dog. When Max goes beyond Thunderdome, he has moved beyond madness and boyhood and macho to manhood and adult heroism. In an Age of Rambo (and maybe even *Aliens*' Ripley), it is a particularly significant cinematic achievement to show that heroism has less to do with "kicking ass" than with making decisions consciously, feelingly, and, when taking risks in a good cause, with sacrifice.³ *Beyond Thunderdome* takes great care to be sure that lesson gets through: it significantly alters the hero myth in the coalescing of the new society around Savannah Nix, not Max—who can too easily be mistaken as only the embodiment of the warrior ideal. Savannah's assumption of the role of hero begins in the gorge where she continues to dream of Tomorrow-morrowland while "First Tracker" Slake's vision narrows to the comfortable confines of the gorge. Slake's passing on of the Tell—the recitation of the tribe's history—to Savannah becomes a highly symbolic gesture. By denying Tomorrow-morrowland and choosing to remain in the green gorge, Slake, who at first shows all the signs of being the next generation's macho hero, has abdicated moral leadership of the tribe. It is left to Savannah, who finds Captain Walker and keeps the dream of Tomorrow-morrowland alive for the rest of the children, to resist Max's potential tyranny in the gorge and lead the small party into the wasteland in pursuit of the dream. Savannah's elevation to the role of hero and culture-bearer yields a break with the cyclical view of history and culture, permitting an ending that includes hope while reminding us that the conventional comic-romance rejuvenation is impossible in the aftermath of a nuclear war. It is precisely this redefining of heroism and reshaping of traditional mythic patterns in the film that makes *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* significant as a post-apocalyptic vision.

NOTES

1. What we might call "the pure *Shane* motif" (the preservation of civilization by the Western movie hero who must move on) has been used in an SF post-disaster setting in *Warlords of the Twenty-first Century* (original title, *Battletruck*, North American release 1982). The indebtedness of *Beyond Thunderdome* to the tradition of the Western and the intention to work variations upon the conventions of the Western are indicated early in the film: Max's "covered wagon" as he moves across the desert is a motor vehicle pulled by camels; we see Max's cowboy boots shortly before he enters Bartertown, but Bartertown bears a modern cliché for its motto and stylistically combines the Western town with primitive villages, TV game-show sets, and cities from *Sword and Sorcery* and the Biblical Epic films.

2. *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* would well repay a full archetypal analysis, and we recommend such an attempt to critics expert in Jungian analysis. We acknowledge with thanks the aid of John H. Crow in our understanding of the Jungian elements of both *A Boy and His Dog* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*.

3. Ripley is a fairly traditional hero in *Alien* (1979); she's unusual mostly insofar as she's a traditional hero who is a woman. In *Aliens* (1986), she has grown enough to participate in the Mother archetype. Note though that Ripley's saving of the little girl Newt in *Aliens* is in the same structural position of her returning for the cat in *Alien*—and that both actions can be read as little more than the old Heinleinian idea, central to the second *Rambo* film, of allowing the enemy to hold none of one's people prisoner (see *Starship Troopers*, pp. 176-77). Ripley is several centuries and lightyears beyond Rambo, but she has not yet left the traditional path that created him.

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RÉSUMÉ

Peter C. Hall et Richard D. Erlich. Au-delà de Topeka et du dôme de tonnerre: des variations sur le schème romance/comique dans des films récent de science-fiction.—Dans Mad Max au delà du dôme de tonnerre, les modèles mythiques traditionnels sont remaniés afin d'éviter les problèmes éthiques et esthétiques inhérents à l'expression romance/comique utilisée dans certains films post-apocalyptiques. On retrouve, dans des films plus anciens, la tendance de présenter les histoires post-apocalyptiques comme des variations du schème traditionnel de la romance/comique aboutissant à l'espoir d'une régénération des terres arides. Afin d'affronter les problèmes qui surgissent de ce désert, dans Dr Folamour et dans Apocalypse 2024 il y a glissement vers le mode ironique et une privation délibérément satirique du schème romance/comique. Au-delà du dôme de tonnerre va au-delà du cynicisme satirique en créant un nouveau «mythos». Tout en soulignant les effets horribles de la guerre nucléaire, on trouve dans le film l'espoir de voir naître une civilisation qui évitera le cycle de la guerre et de la destruction dans un nouveau monde centré sur une héroïne porteuse d'une culture humaniste qui sera véritablement humaine. (PCH/RDE)

Abstract.—*In Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome traditional mythic patterns are reshaped, and this has the effect of obviating ethical and aesthetic problems inherent in the comic-romance form when used for post-apocalyptic film. Earlier films had tended to present post-apocalyptic stories as variations upon the traditional comic-romance pattern, leading to the hope for a possible rejuvenation of the wasteland. In Dr Strangelove and A Boy and His Dog, the problems posed by that wasteland are met with a shift into the ironic mode, with a savagely satiric frustration of the comic-romance pattern. Beyond Thunderdome shows a way beyond satiric cynicism by creating a new mythos. While emphasizing the horrible effects of nuclear war, the movie offers hope for the birth of a civilization which will avoid the cycle of warfare and destruction in a new world centered on a female hero who is bearer of a human culture that is truly humane. (PCH/RDE)*

Thomas B. Byers

Commodity Futures: Corporate State and Personal Style In Three Recent Science-Fiction Movies

Visions of the future that extrapolate contemporary trends to envision their possible consequences have long been part of cultural and political discourse and debate. Three notably successful movies of recent years—Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982) and Nicholas Meyer's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982)—together offer an interesting example of such visionary debate. It is significant that all three appeared during the explosion of popular interest in computers, high-tech industry, and genetic engineering, and that the latter two were in production during the political elevation of Ronald Reagan and the rise of young urban professionals as a highly visible force in patterns of culture and consumption. But the link among them is not merely temporal; it is also thematic. All three specifically explore the relationship between high-tech corporate capitalism on the one hand, and individual modes and styles of personal behavior on the other.¹ Interestingly enough, they express a good deal of agreement concerning the *nature* of the infrastructure's demands and influences on the individual, but Scott and Meyer—or, more properly, Scott and the whole *Star Trek* team—are diametrically opposed in their *evaluation* of these demands and influences. All three films suggest an inevitable conflict between human feelings and bonds on the one hand, and duty to the socio-economic structure on the other. *Alien* and *Blade Runner* warn us against a capitalist future gone wrong, where such feelings and bonds are so severely truncated that a quite literal dehumanization has become perhaps the gravest danger. In a surprisingly direct contrast, *Star Trek II* smiles on a future whose challenges are met by a reaffirmation of the traditional values, and in particular the repressed and withholding interpersonal style, of the white male bourgeoisie.

1. *Alien*: Punishing MU TH UR's Children. *Alien* spins one of the most terrifying of SF's many ecological cautionary tales. The crew of the *Nostromo* work for a corporation whose stated (if at first secret) orders make all other considerations secondary to the delivery of an alien life-form that, as one character suggests, may prove to be an asset for the weapons division. For the corporation, all life is commodity, and the crew members are expendable. Hence the latter are victims at once of the corporation's greed and of an incomprehensible, sinister, and overwhelmingly powerful natural creature that in a sense wreaks vengeance for its disturbance by the human beings. Indeed, by their transformation of nature into commodity, human beings have become the true aliens.²

As for the monster itself, Jeff Gould points out that it is "implacably hostile," and "in all respects a superior product of competitive evolution and resembles nothing so much as that other superorganism, itself victor in an evolutionary struggle: the multinational (soon to be interstellar) corporation. In the system of the narrative, the Alien is the double...of the Company" (Gould: 283). The creature is, in fact, an embodiment of nature as perceived by corporate capitalism, and by an evolutionary science whose emphasis on competition is a manifestation of capitalist ideology.³ As such it is, as we will see later, in some horrible sense the nature that the crew of the *Nostromo* in general deserve.

But the creature is not the only antagonist, nor the most direct sign of the corporation's evil, present on the ship. It is covertly aided by the science officer, Ash, until, in one of the movie's most shocking scenes, he is decapitated and thus revealed to be a stunningly complex and lifelike robot. If the creature is an other that turns out to be less different from the crew than at first appears, the robot is one that at first appears to be one of them. The relation of corporate technocracy to personal behavior is raised most explicitly by his very indistinguishability. All along, Ash has been at once the most disagreeable character and the one most loyal to the corporation. Significantly, however, until this point he has seemed to differ from the others only in degree, not at all in kind. *All* of the crew are children of technology; at the beginning they emerge, dressed in diaper-like wrappings, from the suspended animation units that are the frozen womb of the ship's computer, whose name is "mother" (MU TH UR). All, including the protagonist and sole survivor, Ripley, are technocrats, and their behavioral style is efficient but, as Harvey R. Greenberg points out, "impersonal, tense, slightly abrasive. There is hardly a trace of empathy....[Moreover,] it is strongly suggested that the source of the *Nostromo*'s impoverished relatedness lies in an overweening lust for gain, a life-denying greediness that extends from the highest levels of *Alien*'s world to root itself within the individual psyche" (Greenberg: 260). The crew's ordeals and (with one exception) their deaths result in large part from the fact that they cannot tell Ash from themselves until it is too late. But one reason they cannot do so is that they have chosen, out of the same greed that motivated his creators, to be like him.

Moreover, once the crew members have made such a choice, the problem of recognizing the machine in their midst is compounded by the fact that they now find themselves in circumstances where the key traits necessary for success, or even survival, are self-control and cool competence. Ripley endures in part because she is amply gifted with these (in contrast to the other female crew member, Lambert, who is slaughtered when she freezes with fear). Audience identification with Ripley is strong, partly because her situation is so desperate. But she is excellently adapted to her spaceship environment, and her coldness, especially unusual for a Hollywood-style heroine, is part of her adaptation.

Both her unwillingness to act on emotion and her own dedication to company policy emerge most strongly in contrast with Ash's only moment of apparent emotion or altruism. This comes when he violates policy by opening the quarantine door to admit the explorers Dallas, Lambert, and

Kane, together with the creature, which has attached itself to Kane's face. Though Ash seems to act out of sympathy for Kane, we find later that he has in fact been motivated only by the company's top priority, the safe return of the alien. But most interesting here is the fact that, given their present situation, the crew *must*, for the sake of their very survival, do as Ripley does, and follow procedures that leave no room for emotion or for sympathy with the individual. The irony, of course, is that this is precisely the sort of behavior both honored and manifested by a corporation that finally cares about its workers not at all. Thus its robot agent admires the horrible alien for what he calls "its purity," a structural perfection matched only by its hostility, and geared solely for survival, unclouded by conscience or delusions of morality.

Of course, the film's own values finally contradict Ash's.⁴ Not only is his behavior (or more precisely that of the corporate force behind him) clearly evil, but the deaths of the crew members may be seen symbolically in terms of a system of moral retribution. Kane, who dies first, is the most eager raider of nature, and as such the clearest embodiment of the imperialist attitude towards the other. He volunteers for the exploratory mission; and it is he who looks around most curiously and aggressively, who finds the alien, and who triggers its hostile life by his prying at its egg. For this latter act, he earns a name homonymous with that of the first murderer. Dallas, the captain, dies because, in ceding authority about the alien to the sinister Ash (against Ripley's advice), he too blindly accepts company policy and thus fails to protect his colleagues adequately. At first glance this seems to suggest a contradiction, for Ripley was right when she tried to follow policy. But the difference is that in her case policy intersects with human needs, and indeed turns out not to be consonant with the company's true but concealed interest in the situation; that interest is finally being protected by Ash when he violates the stated policy. As for Dallas, he acts more or less mechanically, with no individual assessment of the situation at all; he simply does what he has been told to do. If Kane actively embodies the values of venture capitalism and imperialism, Dallas follows the system's orders. Here, as at Nuremburg, his type is found guilty.

Brett and Parker, the crew's working class, clearly hold the least allegiance to the corporation. But they do buy into its values, for their primary concern is their own economic gain. Brett is the less helpful and more overtly selfish of the two, and hence he gets his first. Lambert's problem is a little different; she is so weakened by fear for her own life that she lacks competence and fails to help Parker, and her weakness is finally fatal. There is, by the way, a dig at the predominantly white male power structure in the fact that the minority character (Parker, who is black) and the women (Lambert, Ripley) live the longest.

In moral terms, Ripley survives, despite her coldness, for two major reasons. First, she is the most group-oriented (or least totally self-absorbed) character; she sounds genuinely concerned when she tells Dallas to be careful, and after his death insists to the others that "we have to stick together." Indeed, though her decision not to open the quarantine door seems heartless, it is motivated in part by a sense of the collective good, and is vindicated

later. Second, Ripley does show some altruism, and some connection to a not-totally-alien nature, when she risks her life to save the cat, Jonesey. Note also that when she is on the escape ship and thinks she has blown up the alien, she holds and strokes the cat, and says comfortingly, "All right, it's nice to see you too." And when she finally does triumph, her last line is: "Let's go home [i.e., back to Earth], Jonesey."

Yet even though Ripley avoids total amorality and iciness (and thereby earns a name only one letter different from the director's as well as an escape from death), her case, too, is part of the cautionary tale. She too must suffer horrible tribulations for her vocational choice. For, again, what she has chosen is a situation in which the most valued and even necessary traits are also the ones that serve to make human beings essentially indistinguishable from the corporation's literal, and malevolently controlled, robots.

2. *Blade Runner*: Doing a Man's Job. It is just this indistinguishability that lies at the heart of *Blade Runner*.⁵ Here the giant Tyrell Corporation's most advanced products are utterly lifelike "replicants," produced by genetic engineers. They are stronger than, and at least as intelligent as, their creators. Moreover, they are so advanced that they've developed a serious flaw: they have the capacity, over an extended period of time, to develop human emotions, and when they do so they can become uncontrollable. So they have been given a failsafe mechanism—a "life"-span of only four years, after which they self-destruct. In addition, the newest models have been supplied with built-in memories of their fictitious childhoods, as a kind of cushion against the emotions, so that they may be controlled more easily. But even these devices haven't been enough, and hence replicants have been outlawed on Earth since some of them rebelled and killed several people off-planet. Emotion may lead to revolution. Indeed, the replicants are now such a threat that units of special police/executioners—blade runners—have been formed on Earth to "retire" (i.e., kill) them on sight.

Social attitudes towards the replicants are racist: a police captain refers to them as "skin-jobs," and the protagonist, a blade runner named Deckard, tells us that this is the equivalent of "nigger" in our own time. Moreover, as in racist societies generally, a great deal of emphasis is put on the making of ever finer distinctions between the dominant group and those believed to be inferior. And this emphasis results from the increasing difficulty of sustaining any clear or justifiable distinction between master and slave.

The difference is blurred most obviously by the increasingly human traits of the replicants. Indeed, with the addition of the memories, and of snapshots purporting to document them, at least one replicant, Rachel, is herself unaware that she is not human. Deckard finds this fact somewhat disturbing and perhaps cruel. But when he asks Mr Tyrell, the corporate head who is the film's most unmitigated villain, how Rachel can not know what she is, he really explains *why*, not how. "Commerce," he says with a gleam of satisfaction, and then: "More human than human is our motto."⁶

All of this ends up posing a problem for Deckard that goes far beyond the difficulty of making sure he's discovered the proper figures to "retire." He cannot be certain that he himself is not a replicant. This uncertainty is

made explicit when Rachel asks him if he has ever taken the eye test by which replicants are identified. Her question arises because of a pattern similar to the one we saw in *Alien*. For Deckard to do his unpleasant job, and thus to remain a cop rather than one of the "little people" (a potential victim of the power structure),⁷ he must be emotionless. He has been the best of blade runners, but at the expense of, among other things, his marriage: he says that his ex-wife called him "sushi," which he translates as "cold fish." To fulfill his social function, a function necessitated by and executed in the service of corporate interests, he must have precisely the qualities that Ash values in the alien or that the society of *Blade Runner* values in replicants. He must be strong, intelligent, competent, and above all without qualm, fear, or any other human emotional response.

Now, however, he has tried to quit because he "had had a bellyful of killing" (he rejects the euphemism "retirement"). In other words, he has begun to see the replicants as human, and to get squeamish. Later he tells us: "Replicants weren't supposed to have feelings. Neither were blade runners. What the hell was happening to me?" Immediately after he explains that the replicants have a special attachment to their photographs (because they need them to shore up their "memories"), we see Deckard himself deep in contemplation over his own collection of old photos. More is suggested in these details than a mere growth in sympathy for the replicants. Deckard's development of feelings parallels their own, and is just as inappropriate to his social role. If he *is* human, human beings and their artificial doubles are fast converging.

Hence in the climactic scene, the ironies proliferate around the taunting question that Roy Batty, the most fearsome of the replicants, poses to Deckard as Roy stalks him. The question is "Aren't you the good man?" First of all, Deckard cannot say whether he is a man of any sort. Second, being a good man seems in this society to mean being a good killer, inhumane and affectless. Third, at the crucial moment it is Roy who acts humanely, sparing and even saving his victim, out of a love of life. And these ironies are further compounded by the tribute paid to Deckard after his violent mission is completed: "You've done a man's job." Ultimately, his developing feelings for Rachel force Deckard to flee the society, to enter a natural wilderness as he plunges into an existential commitment to a life—and especially an emotional life—with her. The Tyrell Corporation's society has no place for such a "natural" life.⁸

Of course, the movie ends with the affirmation of Deckard's commitment. But it also leaves us with the nagging fear that he may be a replicant, and hence doomed. We tend to assume that he is human, but we cannot be certain. And even if he is taken to be a replicant, the film's cautionary point is simply reinforced, for the society portrayed is one that has become so cold that the robots are more human than the human beings. Indeed, the overall effect of the tale is to indicate that in such a society the identifying characteristics of humanity (at least in the sense of humaneness) would be so drained away as to deconstruct more or less thoroughly the traditional human/robot (humane/inhumane, feeling/unfeeling) opposition. What SF has traditionally taken to be a difference *between* the human and the robotic

would then emerge more clearly as a difference *within* the human. That this is in fact already the true locus of the opposition was the explicitly stated position of the late Philip K. Dick, the author of the novel (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) on which *Blade Runner* is based:

There is amongst us something that is a bi-pedal humanoid, morphologically identical to the human being but which is not human....*Within our species* is a bifurcation, a dichotomy between the truly human and that which mimics the truly human. (Quoted in Strick, p. 172; emphasis added.)

As others have pointed out, *Blade Runner*, like *Alien*, finally retreats from the implications of its radical critique into filmic clichés (see Chevrier: 57) and individualist solutions (see Kellner *et al.*: 8).⁹ Created within the Hollywood style in terms of both genre and cinematography, and aiming at an audience that is both identified and managed by the Hollywood system of production and distribution, the films are bound, consciously or not, by formidable constraints. Nonetheless, both of them do offer such a radical critique, in more ways than one. Their strongest common element in this regard is their insistence on the dehumanization necessary for human survival in a world dominated by mega-corporations. Human relationships to the robotic villain of *Alien*'s glossy high-tech spaceship, and to the more complex but equally fearsome replicants of *Blade Runner*'s futuristic *film noir* vision of urban decay, function to raise this issue in powerful terms.

3. *Star Trek II: Resurrecting the (WASP) Fathers.* In many regards, what *Alien* and *Blade Runner* criticize, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* mythicizes and justifies by presenting an entirely different vision of the capitalist future. Since, unlike the works already discussed, this movie does not focus its exploration of the relationship between the economic infrastructure and the behavior of individuals on the doubling motif, and since this particular episode in the ongoing *Star Trek* saga has received relatively little critical attention, it is necessary to consider it somewhat more broadly here. What such a consideration ultimately will show is that *Star Trek II* largely affirms, with some variations, not only the personal styles that *Alien* and *Blade Runner* question, but also the bourgeois patriarchal structures of power and values that give rise to these ways of behaving. Where conformity to the demands of these structures is dehumanizing and dangerous in Scott's films, it is seen as both necessary and proper in *Star Trek II*.

Typically enough for a bourgeois myth, *Star Trek II* seldom overtly discusses economic arrangements. It prefers instead to emphasize the military half of the military-industrial complex. However, its very silence on economics, when coupled with its support of contemporary middle-class notions, suggests that there is no major economic difference between its world and our own, and thus implicitly supports the present status quo. The starship, after all, is the *Enterprise*. What is different in this future, however, is the total erasure of any systemic racial, national, class, or gender conflict. The good characters include a black captain (Terrell), an Asian (Sulu), a Russian (Chekhov), and a woman (Saavik). All of these have been successfully assimilated; all admire and (when not mentally controlled by the villain) work loyally for Kirk, the white male supreme. The black even commits suicide rather

than betray him (the contrast between this group's allegiances and those of the crew of the *Nostromo* is instructive). As for class differences, there aren't any; the only hierarchy is a meritocratic one of rank and experience.

Though the Klingons get passing mention, they are simply a faceless evil force. The only true villain is the mad, overweening egotist, Khan. His extreme personality places him outside the social order. For one thing, he's too intellectual—and eccentric—to be “one of us” (as we are represented by the crew of the *Enterprise*), for he reads Shakespeare and even quotes Melville. More importantly, he's finally brought down by blind, tumultuous passion for vengeance: Kirk has inadvertently caused Khan's wife's death, but Chekhov sets the record straight by telling Khan that Kirk was “only doing his duty.” Thus Khan lacks or rejects the technocratic values of moderation, self-control, obedience to authority, and objectivity. Consequently, he is a “bad father,” who leads his band of disaffected youth to their deaths. If the example of the Ahab he quotes was a caution against transcendentalism, Khan himself is an exemplary caution against the emotionalist and non-conformist spirit of the 1960s, which revived that earlier movement. As for his young followers, they are clearly space-hippies in their hairstyles and clothes,¹⁰ and are thus opposed to Kirk's clean-cut, uniformed “children” (his word) whom he commands on a “training mission” that becomes a rite of passage. The uniformity that is in *Alien* a sign of dehumanization is here a sign of proper allegiance.

Moreover, Khan's people are not only hippies, but terrorists; they seek to weaken the power structure by attacks on innocent third parties. In a world where there are no political problems, however, their violent actions are as emptied of historical justification as their hip appearance; such actions only serve the leader's desire for personal revenge, the desire of an idiosyncratic, warped, and malevolent mind. The question of whether, and when, terrorism is politically or historically justified is evaded in favor of a mythification that implies that things are really all much easier than that: terrorists are simply Khans, selfishly aggrieved loonies who refuse to accept our wonderful world and the happiness it offers uniformly to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, or gender.

Of course, this view of terrorism is precisely what we would expect of such a Hollywood product; it is nearly as conventional as the “bomber-crew” ethnic pattern. But in this movie the common Hollywood myth that all the world's problems stem from personal villainy is also part of a larger pattern that works uncommonly hard to resolve the “generation gap” of the '60s in favor of the patriarchy's vision of the “good father.” Thus the movie includes two other major lines of conflict. The first concerns Kirk—Captain America, in more than one important sense—against his own aging and the demands of a culture that would subtly emasculate him by installing him as teacher and bureaucrat rather than violent, heroic man of action. Here the movie does suggest some criticism of the homogenizing tendencies of the liberal technocracy. But it is clearly a critique from the right, not the left. For Kirk (unlike his crew) is envisioned along entrepreneurial lines in terms of personal style (though not in terms of actual economic niche). Though he both accepts and serves the Establishment's ultimate interests and values,

he quarrels with its notion of means. He can be more effective if he is freer to operate—if he is able, for instance, to act on the intuition that is clearly part of his character (see Ellington & Critelli: 244, 247). In his particular case (though by no means in general), a somewhat more *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the power structure would be more productive.

The second, related conflict is between Kirk and domesticity, as embodied in his former lover and in the son he fathered but deserted for the larger role of protecting society. It's no accident that the latter two are civilians working on a government grant; they're part of the mistaken liberal establishment. The son, David, has developed a hatred for Kirk and all he stands for. When Khan tries to steal the funded research—the life-giving Genesis Project—the son all too easily believes Kirk is stealing it for the military, and thereby breaking the government's promise. David has pacifist tendencies, and his pacificism seems to be both a consequence of his having been raised by his mother, without a properly virile, violent role-model, and a kind of reaction-formation. He reacts both against the father he really "is a lot like" (as his mother says) and against his Oedipal hostility towards that figure. Thus it comes as only a mild surprise when at one point his psychic defenses fail and he goes for Kirk with a knife. The knife is something of an anachronism in this movie's world, but its Freudian resonances make it the only fitting weapon for this scene. And it comes as no surprise at all when the father easily disarms the son. However, the attack does divert Kirk just long enough to allow some agents of Khan to get the drop on him. David's adolescent rebellion helps place Dad in a much more serious crisis, just as rightists claimed the youth rebellion of the '60s threatened to distract and thereby weaken America *vis-à-vis* its external enemies.

Naturally, this family conflict is resolved towards the end. After Khan has been defeated, David comes to Kirk who, knowing the boy's previous hatred, tries to dodge the encounter. But what David forces him to hear is music to his ears: "I was wrong about you, and I'm sorry. I'm proud to be your son." Then in one of those rare moments of an emotion Kirk generally withholds, the two embrace. Fathers all over the theater should be cheering at this point, for Kirk and all he stands for—patriarchal white America, the sex-role division that approves the father's non-participation in the work of child-rearing, and the benign violence of proper authority—have been vindicated. Kirk's choice to absent himself from personal relationships, his repression of eros and empathy for the sake of duty to a larger socio-economic structure, is here seen not as Ridley Scott would see it—as a sign of alienation or dehumanization—but as a mark of altruism. Despite the son's earlier feelings, the father's love has not really been withheld; rather, it has been expressed in protection for his family and for the society. If anyone has really suffered here, it has not been the single-parent mother (whose job it was to rear the child anyway), not the immature lad, but the father who has given up so much—who has even risked giving up their love—for their sake. Of course an even remotely feminist analysis exposes how self-serving this position is for the father; and the movie itself (unwittingly, I think) signals the duplicity involved in it, by showing how much Kirk enjoys the world of work to which he has supposedly sacrificed himself.

In order further to grasp the movie's view specifically of emotion, and of proper masculine behavior, we must consider the treatment of Mr Spock. Though rendered quite differently, he is *Star Trek*'s equivalent of *Alien*'s robot in that he is supposedly emotionless and absolutely logical.¹¹ However, since to make him a robot would, by the SF code, be clearly pejorative, he is an alien instead. Nonetheless, he is Kirk's best friend (while he also serves to make Kirk more human by contrast). And as Spock dies in *Star Trek II*, we find once again that even he is not really emotionless. Like Kirk, he must have feelings in order to be good. But they must be concealed except in the most compelling circumstances, and then they must be drastically understated, and expressed only to another man in male camaraderie. In this movie, as often in white male middle-class America, we are to hide our cake and eat it too, as gestures of feeling become the more poignant for their rarity. This essentially anal attitude is precisely fitted to the man's role in capitalist society. On one level, it keeps him subdued and under control, and prevents feelings from interfering with duty. On another, it is a manifestation of the supremely bourgeois Calvinist ideology that makes emotion the equivalent of other commodified values; one is to have it and hoard it, but not to use it or show it ostentatiously.

Finally, *Star Trek II* represents the apotheosis of the rational, emotionally restrained man. Spock dies that others may live, and there is a clear implication, at the end, of his impending resurrection in *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*. Thus themes and myths converge with box-office necessity. Moreover, not only is the rational man Christ-like, but in a brash reversal of cinematic codes, he is identified with nature as positive value; at the end, in his black capsule/coffin, Spock lies on the new, fecund planet Genesis, awaiting his own return to life.

It would be easy to make too much of all this. *Star Trek II*, like *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, is intended primarily as entertainment, not propaganda. Certainly it is more a reflection and reinforcement than an active shaper of current values. Nonetheless, it does seem to affirm the very sorts of social arrangements and trends that *Alien* and *Blade Runner* find so threatening. That it does so with considerable wit simply makes careful "reading" of it more important (and thus helps keep critics in business, too). In any case, all these movies demonstrate once again how actively popular art in general, and especially SF, may engage in cultural debate, and hence may demand a response that recognizes and evaluates the messages they carry. In this particular case, as all three movies see a specific kind of value system and personal style as emerging from large-scale corporate capitalism, they encourage us to pose certain crucial questions. If we choose to try to maintain our current social and economic arrangements (and if they aren't changed for us), will we become Ripleys or Kirks, Spocks or Ashes? Will we be able to tell the difference? Or will we choose not to find out?

NOTES

1. For a broader overview of recent futuristic movies in their cultural context, see H. Bruce Franklin's useful "Don't Look Where We're Going: The Vision of

the Future in Science-Fiction Films, 1970-1982." Of the films discussed there, *Outland* (1981) would be the most logical candidate for inclusion here, since it does broach the issue of the destruction of human relationships in a nightmarishly technologized and profit-centered world. Specifically, the marshal's wife leaves him early in the film because she cannot stand to live or to raise their son in such a place. But the issue is raised only to be repressed, partly because *Outland*, as a futuristic remake of *High Noon*, is so dominated by the ideology and myth of the western that it fails to do much with the social problems its world suggests (see Franklin, p. 76). Moreover, though the film's world in general is loveless, the marshal's own emotional capacities are never really at issue, and the duty with which his love conflicts is not social or economic, but only an existential duty to himself, reminiscent of John Wayne's famous statement of principle in *Stagecoach* (1939): "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." Finally, then, the treatment of the particular issues that are my subject is not so rich in *Outland* as in the three films I discuss at more length.

2. A further ironic application of the title to the crew members themselves is suggested by Kenneth Jurkiewicz's description of them as "classically alienated laborers" (p. 17). Note also Judith Newton's comment, in her contribution to the "Symposium on *Alien*": "The film evokes, in rather explicit fashion, the...uneasy recognition that now everyone is...a company man or company woman, somebody whose work is neither controlled by nor understood by them, and somebody who is finally expendable in the name of profit. [Thus] the title of the *Alien* ship, *Nostramo*, 'nostro homo,' our man, makes allusion...to Conrad's working-class hero, another company man, who dies understanding that he has been betrayed by 'material interests'" (Newton, p. 293).

3. Contrast, for instance, the much less individualist and competitive view of nature (including evolution) in Lewis Thomas's *The Lives of a Cell* (1975).

4. The entire "Symposium on *Alien*" is recommended, along with Greenberg's excellent essay, as constituting a rich dialogue on the ideological complexity and confusion of *Alien*. This dialogue includes particularly instructive critiques of the ending, based on its individualist rather than collective solution, and on its sexism (see, for instance, Gould, p. 283 and Newton, p. 296). At times, however, dissatisfactions that the film is not radical enough seem to lead to misreadings of its critique of capitalism. Peter Fitting's argument that "the *Alien* suggests the threats which an increasingly militant Third World is seen as posing" is provocative. But when he argues that "the victims of US imperialism are identified...as themselves the source of our problems," or that Ash is an "image...of the stereotyped fears of the inhuman subjection and control of a socialist world" (p. 289), he simply ignores the critique, both frequently explicit and constantly implicit, of the corporation. Ash is *its* agent, not that of a socialist world; as one character puts it, "the company sent us a goddamn robot." Finally, when Fitting argues that "the crew of the *Nostramo* might be seen as the model for a renewed and enlightened capitalism," he fails to take into account the deliberateness with which they are portrayed as cold, alienated, and essentially indistinguishable from Ash.

5. J.P. Telotte's pair of articles and Leonard G. Heldreth's paper offer useful and largely complementary treatments of the blurring of the distinction between human beings and robots in *Blade Runner*. Working in a psychoanalytic and archetypal vein on that film, *Alien*, and several others, Telotte explores the human impulse and capacity to create artificial doubles, and claims that "What these films hope to forestall is the dark obverse of this capacity, that for making human nature artificial as well" ("Human Artifice," p. 51). Heldreth, in a study focussed on the

range of genre codes at work in *Blade Runner*, likewise sees the doubling, and its threat to human identity, as the film's unifying theme. Neither Telotte nor Heldreth, however, show much interest in the relation of the theme to historical conditions or economic arrangements.

6. Having created both a technological monster and an oppressed class, Tyrell, the mad scientist/master, finally pays the price. He becomes victim of his own obsessions, as they are powerfully embodied in his creation/slave, Roy Batty, the leader of the rebel replicants. When the two meet late in the film, Tyrell calls Roy the prodigal son, and excuses his wrongdoing because "you've...done extraordinary things." Then they kiss full on the lips, and Roy, who seems to have a particularly monstrous Oedipal problem, snaps his "father's" neck, and presses out the latter's eyes. Surely this too is a cautionary tale.

7. In *Blade Runner*, as in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (to which Scott pays tribute), class structure is vividly reflected in the city's physical levels. Here, however, the lower classes are not underground, but on the surface, while the upper classes are far above, physically detached from Earth and from the ecological wreckage they have made of it (see Chevrier, p. 52). Yves Chevrier's essay offers an excellent discussion of *Blade Runner's* *mise-en-scène*, and particularly its "visual polyphony" as "description of a society" (p. 51). I cannot, however, agree with his assessment that in the film "the political dimension is completely ignored"; nor do I think that the plot in general, and the confrontation of Deckard and Roy Batty in particular, are "banal" because "the killing is restricted to rebel robots; it does not concern human members of society" (Chevrier, p. 56). Part of the point, in fact, is that such "restrictions" are utterly blurred, and more or less impossible to maintain, in this film's world. Finally, when Chevrier criticizes the characterization of Deckard because he acts "without political decisions or debates," and without "expressing some grievance" (p. 56), he fails to recognize Deckard's (admittedly understated) confusion and moral qualms. We must remember that we *are* provided a motive for the character's acceptance of his role—if he does not do as he is told, he will lose his social standing. And to criticize the script because the character's introspection is not more politically articulate is to overlook the degree to which political discourse is essentially foreclosed in the ultra-capitalist world the film depicts.

8. On the other hand, having created a nearly purely artificial world, the rich have also turned certain manifestations of nature—real animals—into status symbols, commodities valued precisely for their scarcity. We learn this from the snake-dancer, Zhora, who could work in a much better nightclub if her snakes were real.

9. Kellner *et al.* suggest a "double reading" of the ending, and refuse to dismiss it as a simple retreat into privatism: "Romance signifies escape but also resistance. It atomizes the collectivity in ways conducive to domination, yet it also creates a protected arena where a human autonomy is possible, one founded in compassionate values and one that would be the basis for a genuine collectivity. Thus if *Blade Runner* exaggerates privatism, it may be because in contemporary capitalism humane values are only possible in the private sphere" (p. 8).

10. I use "hippies" here not in the specific sense of "flower-children," but generically, as a synonym for "longhairs." In her review of this film, Pauline Kael says that Khan "and his blond-barbarian followers are dressed like...a sixties motorcycle gang." This is close, but they are a little too blond and clean for Hell's Angels; they look somewhat more like university radicals.

11. For a similar comparison of Spock to *Alien's* Ash, see Jurkiewicz's essay, which deals with *Alien*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *The Black Hole*, and *The Empire Strikes Back*. While our views are compatible, he focusses specifically on

attitudes towards technology itself, rather than on the whole relationship of infrastructure to the superstructure of human behavior in a highly technologized capitalist society. It is this latter concern that distinguishes the movies I have considered from such standard SF fare as *The Terminator* (1984), a sort of neo-Luddite nightmare in which the fear of technology is outstripped only by the fascination with it.

For a particularly fine study of the patriarchal structures of the *Star Trek* television series, and of the secure places of Kirk and Spock within these structures, see Anne Cranny-Francis's "Sexuality and Sex-Role Stereotyping in *Star Trek*." Comparison of her analysis to mine should indicate the basic continuities between the television and the movie characters.

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RÉSUMÉ

Thomas B. Byers. *Les avènements mercantiles: l'Etat corporatiste et le style personnel de trois films récents de science-fiction*.—*Alien*: le 8^{ième} passager et *Blade Runner* de Ridley Scott et *Star Trek II*: le colère de Khan de Nicholas Meyer offrent un exemple intéressant du débat politique mené en fonction de visions de l'avenir. Les

trois films scrutent précisément la relation entre le capitalisme corporatiste de haute technologie et les genres et types individuels du comportement personnel. Bien que ces films montrent une acception semblable de la nature des exigences et des influences des infrastructures sur l'individu, le conservatisme de *Star Trek II* est diamétralement opposé aux critiques radicales trouvées dans *Alien* et dans *Blade Runner* quant à l'appréciation de ces mêmes exigences et influences.

Alien et *Blade Runner* servent d'avertissement face à un avenir détraqué où l'absence d'humanisation, l'un des plus grands dangers, est si totale qu'elle efface la distinction entre les êtres humains et les robots. Les exigences d'une telle société rendent les gens distants et les poussent à un état d'indifférence qui sert les intérêts corporatistes aux dépens de l'humain. *Alien* est à la fois une parabole écologique et un conte moral. Les technocrates qui participent à la structure corporatiste ne se distinguent presque plus des robots qui les entourent, et leur acceptation du système les oblige à payer un terrible prix. *Blade Runner* continue d'explorer le manque de démarcation entre l'humain et l'humanoïde à un point tel que le héros n'est plus certain d'être humain et que l'adversaire inhumain agit finalement d'une manière plus humaine que les humains eux-mêmes. La déconstruction de l'opposition humain/humanoïde est au centre de la critique d'une organisation économique et politique d'une société future qui est un prolongement de la nôtre.

Les films de Scott critiquent ce que le film de Meyer hausse au niveau du mythe, justifie et loue. Le film cache ou efface toute notion de conflit systématique ou historique et donc annule la possibilité de justifier le non-conformisme ou la rébellion. Les «méchants» sont traités en hippies irrationnels, terroristes de l'espace, menés par un fou. Leurs agissements sont grandement favorisés par la naïveté et l'irrationalité du fils pacifiste du Capitaine Kirk qui doit comprendre à quel point il est écervelé et qui doit accepter les valeurs et le pouvoir de l'Amérique blanche et patriarcale. Les choix que fait Kirk de se retirer de toute relation personnelle ainsi que de réprimer l'amour et l'empathie dans l'intérêt d'une structure socio-économique plus grande ne sont pas considérés comme des marques d'aliénation ou de manque d'humanisation, mais comme une preuve d'altruisme. Le film représente l'apothéose du héros mâle rationnel qui domine ses émotions ainsi que l'affirmation de l'ordre établi qu'il sert à l'encontre des femmes, des intellectuels et des autres personnages irrationnels et dangereux. Ainsi le contraste entre cette vision de l'avenir et celle de Scott correspond sans équivoque à l'opposition entre deux attitudes politiques actuelles, deux approches de la société bourgeoise dans un état avancé du capitalisme. (TBB)

Abstract.—*Ridley Scott's Alien and Blade Runner, and Nicholas Meyer's Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan together offer an interesting example of cultural and political debate as carried out in terms of visions of the future. All three specifically explore the relationship between high-tech corporate capitalism on the one hand, and individual modes and styles of personal behavior on the other. While all three offer a similar sense of the nature of the infrastructure's demands and influences on the individual, the conservatism of Star Trek II is diametrically opposed to the radical critiques of Alien and Blade Runner in terms of the evaluation of these demands and influences.*

Both Alien and Blade Runner warn us of a future gone wrong, where one of the gravest dangers is a dehumanization so complete that it erases the distinction between human beings and robots. The demands of such a society make people

increasingly cold, and lure them into an affectless state that serves corporate interests at human expense. Alien is at once an ecological parable and a moral tale, in which the technocrats who participate in the corporate structure are practically indistinguishable from the robot in their midst, and are forced to pay a horrible price for their acquiescence to the system. Blade Runner further explores the indistinguishability of human being and humanoid, carrying it to the point where even the protagonist himself cannot be certain that he is human, and where the inhuman antagonist finally acts more humanely than the human beings. The deconstruction of the human-humanoid opposition is at the center of a critique of the economic and political arrangements of a future society that is an extension of our own.

What Scott's movies criticize, Meyer's mythicizes, justifies, and even celebrates. It conceals or erases any sense of systematic or historical conflict, thereby eliminating any justification for non-conformity or rebellion. Hence its villains are seen as irrational space-hippie terrorists, led by a madman. Their activities are enabled largely by the naïveté and irrationality of Captain Kirk's pacifist son, who must learn how foolish he is, and acquiesce to the values and the power of patriarchal white America. Kirk's choice to absent himself from personal relationships, his repression of eros and empathy for the sake of duty to a larger socio-economic structure, is here seen not as a sign of alienation or dehumanization, but as a mark of altruism. The movie represents the apotheosis of the rational, emotionally restrained male hero, and the affirmation of the establishment he serves, over against women, intellectuals, and other irrational and dangerous types. Thus a contrast between its vision of the future and Scott's vision is clearly a contrast between two present political attitudes, two stances toward bourgeois society in an advanced stage of capitalism. (TBB)

Peter Fitting

Futurecop: The Neutralization of Revolt in *Blade Runner**

My grand theme—who is human and who only appears (masquerades) as human?

Philip K. Dick, Comment (1976) on “Second Variety”

Is it still necessary to state that not technology, not technique, not the machine are the engineers of repression, but the presence, in them, of the masters who determine their number, their life span, their power, their place in life, and the need for them? Is it still necessary to repeat that science and technology are the great vehicles of liberation, and that it is only their use and restriction in the repressive society which makes them into vehicles of domination?

Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*

1. The look of the future in *Blade Runner* (1982) is what strikes us first of all about the film—a look unlike the high-tech visions of so much SF in its more realistic mix of technological advance and continuing decay. Indeed, the visual power and integrity of this glimpse of the future has been the focus of much of the critical writing about the film.¹ In the following remarks, I would like to focus on the actual putting into images of Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), for this recoding, from novel to film, distorts the novel’s ethical message while foregrounding the tracking and “retirement” of the escaped replicants. I am not criticizing the film for what it omits from the novel *per se*, but for its conversion of a moral dilemma into a cynical legitimization of the status quo.

Without going into a full discussion here, the novel’s ethical dimension lies not only in Dick’s “grand theme”—“who is human and who only appears (masquerades) as human?”—but in the empathic spiritual experience of “Mercerism” which is dropped from the film.² The adherent grasps handles attached to an “empathy box” and then experiences Mercer’s climb up a hill as he is pelted by stones, thereby joining in the struggle against entropy and the “tomb world” (18:140-41):

[He] gradually experienced a waning of the living room in which he stood....He found himself, instead, as always before, entering into the landscape of drab hill, drab sky. And at the same time he no longer witnessed the

* This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper read at an international conference (July 1986) on “Philip K. Dick et la Science Fiction Moderne,” co-sponsored by the Université de Paris IV (Sorbonne), Le Centre franco-américain Universitaire (Paris), and the University of California at Riverside.

climb of the elderly man. His own feet now scraped, sought purchase, among the familiar loose stones....

He had crossed over in the usual perplexing fashion; physical merging—accompanied by mental and spiritual identification—with Wilbur Mercer had reoccurred. As it did for everyone who at this moment clutched the handles, either here on Earth or on one of the colony planets. He experienced them, the others, incorporated the babble of their thoughts, heard in his own brain the noise of their many individual existences. They—and he—cared about one thing; this fusion of their mentalities oriented their attention on the hill, the climb, the need to ascend. (2:21-22)

Empathy, as we shall see in a moment, is the key to the novel.

Most movie-goers are familiar with the story of the “blade runner” Rick Deckard, who is forced out of retirement for one last job—to find and “terminate” four advanced androids (“replicants”) who have rebelled and returned illegally to Earth. In Los Angeles in the year 2019, in a world in which pollution and radiation have apparently caused the death of many of the other living creatures on the planet, human technology has made it possible to copy the nearly extinct animals of the recent past. A similar technology makes it possible to build near-perfect copies of human beings. (“More human than Human” is the motto of the replicants’ builder, the Tyrell Corporation.)

These androids were apparently developed to replace men and women in space under conditions in which humans could not function—in a vacuum, for instance, or in extreme cold or heat. While animals and other “lower” life-forms on Earth are presumably duplicated out of nostalgia and guilt, because the original terrestrial animals are almost extinct, there are few reasons given why anyone would go to the expense and trouble of developing a robot which could pass for a human being—especially since this resemblance is the source of considerable anxiety about androids passing as human, an anxiety which generates the plot in both the novel and the film. There is some explanation in the novel, as we learn when Deckard objects to the builder about the development of androids which are almost indistinguishable from humans. Eldon Rosen (renamed Tyrell in the film) replies in strict business terms: “We produced what the colonists wanted.... We followed the time-honored principle underlying every commercial venture. If our firm hadn’t made these progressively more human types, other firms in the field would have” (5:41).³ Whatever the explanation, the robot and its ancestors and relatives have been used—at least since Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*—as a figure for collective anxieties about the dangers of science and technology. At the same time, the robot has often been taken positively, as a figure of the labor-saving possibilities of technology (as summed up in the fiction of Isaac Asimov).⁴

2. As is well known, Philip K. Dick used the figure of the robot, and more precisely that of the android, to raise a number of issues, including that of the original and the copy in the age of mechanical reproduction. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* deals with what could be labelled the “blurring of the human and the machine.” Here Dick walks a very fine line

between attempting to elicit sympathy for the androids (the robot as metaphor of the oppressed and the exploited) and using the android to remind us of the growing risks to our humanity in an increasingly mechanized society.

In the novel, the androids are not so much *not*-human as *inhuman*. As we have seen, the crucial difference is the ability to feel empathy:

He had wondered...precisely why an android bounced helplessly about when confronted by an empathy-measuring test. Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnida.... (3:27)

Empathy is not only the key to distinguishing the human from the non-human (by measuring the ability to feel empathy for other living creatures—the “Voigt-Kampf Empathy Test”), but also, as already noted, the basis for “Mercerism,” the inexplicable empathic mystical experience which is omitted from the film. The androids lack empathy; they cannot participate in the Mercer experience, and in the novel they are eager to expose it as a fraud (18:136). But their inhumanity is especially apparent in the manifestations of the replicants’ cruelty and indifference, as summed up in a crucial scene—absent from the film—in which John Isidore (the model for JF) watches in horror as the androids torture and kill a spider (18:135-40).⁵

Nor is this the only instance in the novel of a rejection of the androids and what they represent, as can most explicitly be seen in the changes to the character of Rachel. The relationship between Rachel and Deckard reflects and increases his growing empathy for the androids he is expected to “retire,” but in the novel Rachael (*sic*) explains that she has gone to bed with him so as to make it impossible for him to retire any more androids, a strategy which she has already used with nine bounty hunters before him (17:131-33).⁶ In the film, Rachel does not set out to seduce Deckard. On the contrary, he is the sexual aggressor, while she is frightened and vulnerable. She did not know that she was not human until Deckard gave her the empathy test and now she is afraid, confused, and lost. She does not ally herself with the other androids—as does Rachael in the novel—but with the one human who tells her the truth. (She in fact saves his life by killing the replicant Leon.) In the novel Pris and Rachael are identical models, made from the same “prototype”—a characteristic which again underlines that the androids are not human. Although Deckard cannot “kill” Rachael, he does kill her “duplicate,” Pris, even as “it” attempts to use its resemblance to Rachael to kill him (19:145-46).

Despite Deckard’s—and the reader’s—hesitations and growing sympathy for the androids, then, a number of incidents, including their torture of the spider, their attempts to undermine Mercerism, and their inability to participate in that empathic experience, as well as the calculatedness of Rachael’s seductive behavior, all make clear in the novel that the androids are meant to be understood as evil and inhuman. Yet the novel ends on an ambiguous note, with Deckard’s continuing doubts about what he has done. The film, on the other hand, eliminates the ambiguity and doubts underlying Deckard’s position through the happy ending, even as it blurs the reasons why the androids must be retired.

Although the replicants occasionally demonstrate superhuman physical abilities, there are few suggestions in the film of their underlying non-human nature. Instead they are obsessed with becoming human. To counteract attempts to return to Earth and live as humans, the replicants of the film have been built with a "fail-safe"—a four-year lifespan.⁷ For this reason, they have come to Earth to learn how to control the aging process. More interestingly, and in ways which are not present in the novel, they are pre-occupied with overcoming their non-humanity—witness their attempts to construct for themselves an individual human past, as summed up in the packs of family photographs which they collect and treasure. Roy, in appearance the coldest and least human of the four replicants, is also the one who thinks the most about his incomplete humanity. The last of Deckard's "assignments," Roy will die not because the bounty-hunter is able to retire him, but because his own brief lifespan has run out. Moreover, when he could kill Deckard, Roy instead lets him live, as a gesture towards the life he has only begun to know. As Deckard says in the voice-over:

I don't know why he saved my life. Maybe in those last moments he loved life more than he ever had before. Not just his life—anybody's life. My life.

All he'd wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where do I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got?

Seen from this perspective, there is a fundamental contradiction at the core of the film; for in the novel, even if it is not completely successful, there was an ethical juxtaposition of the human and the mechanical, a valorization of life and the living and a rejection of the machine; and this polarization between good and evil legitimized and explained the necessity of "retiring" runaway robots. Thus when Deckard consults Mercer, he is told that although all life deserves respect, he must continue to hunt and terminate the escaped androids: "What you are doing has to be done" (19:145). The film, on the other hand, wants it both ways, and at times the narrative of the replicants' struggle to survive threatens to overwhelm the viewers' sympathy with Deckard. There are, for instance, several long scenes in the film which focus entirely on the replicants; and there is, of course, Roy's death, to which I shall return. Indeed, according to Dick, the changes in the presentation of the androids constituted the principal difference between his novel and the film:

[In the novel] the replicants are deplorable...cruel, cold and heartless. They have no empathy...and don't care what happens to other creatures. They are essentially *less* than human.

[Ridley] Scott regarded them as supermen without wings....⁸

Interestingly enough, there is an even more surprising and revealing analogy that the film momentarily brings up to describe the status and meaning of the replicants. Early on, *Blade Runner* explicitly draws a similarity between the androids and another group of Americans who attempted to escape from their enslavement and "pass" for human: when Deckard says (in the voice-over narration) that his boss, because he calls the replicants "skin jobs," is the kind of person who in an earlier day "would have called black men niggers." Although the film does not return to this comparison

(however, before he dies, Roy says to Deckard: "quite an experience to live in fear; that's what it is to be a slave"), it clearly points to the contradictory treatment of the androids in the film. This contradiction becomes sharper if we attempt to pursue the analogy between robots and slaves, for it would be difficult for any but the most racist viewer to continue to sympathize with Deckard if the hunting and killing of the replicants were transformed into the tracking of runaway blacks. In that case, sympathy would clearly and unequivocally lie with the escaped slaves from the beginning. But, as it is, the film retains its ambiguity: the replicants both draw our sympathy and yet, somehow deserve to be killed; or rather, it is only when they are dead that they no longer deserve to be killed! This contradiction suggests that the meaning of the film, unlike the novel, no longer lies with an interpretation of the ethical opposition between the androids and "living" creatures.

3. Instead, the narrative of the escaped androids, it seems to me, provided Scott with an opportunity to display once again filmic images of death and killing. Psychologists write about the effects of media violence on the spectator, but they address less frequently the causes of that violence, the needs that it satisfies and that propel it.⁹ I mention this, although I disagree with much of that research, because in the case of the most developed domain of the psychological study of effects, apart from advertising—namely, the effects of pornography—one can immediately identify, in however direct or indirect a fashion, the origins of this "need" with sexual drives. But violence? Many of you reading this may have explanations for the increasing need for pictorial and filmic representations of violence, but its origins are not as evident as with pornography, however much you may think of pornography as a debased or distorted form of human sexuality. What, we might ask, is the need for the portrayal of violence a distortion or debasement of? Without attempting to answer that question yet, I am arguing that in *Blade Runner* the actual hunting and "termination" of the replicants is but another version of the myriad contemporary depictions of hunting and killing other humans. Here the excuse for that display of killing is to be found in an SF device: the representations of violence with which we are already familiar, as seen in the narratives of cops, sheriffs, and soldiers who are only "doing their duty," is here justified as the hunting down and "termination" of rebellious machines who also happen to look like real men and women. This is but an aspect of what I consider one of the fundamental differences between SF writing and SF film, a difference having to do with the increasing popularity of special effects since the success of *2001* (1968): namely, the foregrounding of visual pyrotechnics for their own sake, as opposed to SF's long claim—however restricted the number of works which actually achieved such a goal—to be a literature of ideas. This should not be taken as either a definition of what SF should be nor a condemnation of the specular vocation of film. I may enjoy such spectacles; but liking is not enough, and it cannot be a substitute for an explanation. Without going into a discussion of such recent SF films as *Road Warrior* (1981) or *The Terminator* (1985), I would point out that films such as those are much more straightforward in their justification for the violence portrayed. *Blade Runner*, on the other

hand, pretends that it is not really stimulating the desire for representations of violence since, after all, these are only machines. Moreover, as we shall see in a moment, some critics argue that violence and selfishness are transcended by the film's ending. Nonetheless, I am arguing that the foregrounding of violence and the change in the nature of the androids subtly and cynically distorts the major themes of Dick's novel by catering to violent escapist fantasies.

4. Let us return, then, to the question of what produces the need for these representations of violence and to the link between that need and the figure of the android. The robot, as I have already pointed out, has long been understood as our symbolic alter ego—a manifestation of the desire for liberation from toil and drudgery and from human frailty and imperfection, and also as the expression of an increasing awareness of our diminished status in the technological society we have built. The androids of *Blade Runner* suggest both of these contradictory possibilities: they offer a glimpse of a liberated and empowered humanity, which could be realized thanks to the wonderful possibilities of technology; but so too, they indicate the terrible price of that seductive empowerment in the substitution for our humanity of the qualities and characteristics of the machine.

Expressed this way, the film's theme seems faithful to Dick's novel, but this does not explain Scott's use of violence. Although Deckard carries out the retirements with increasing reluctance, the film presents those moments in much more vivid and graphic detail than does the novel. Indeed, through the lingering depiction of the termination of the four androids—particularly the two female replicants—the film substantially changes the initial Dickian theme. In the transfer from book to film, then, a new element is introduced which can only be dealt with through the spectacle of violence.

Nonetheless, the scene in which Roy lets Deckard live has led some critics to argue for the "transcendence" of both characters at the end, through their "renunciation of violence" (Kellner *et al.*: 7).

Deckard must put aside his distrust of women, must transcend his emotional aloofness, must finally make the ultimate commitment—to give of himself and his humanity. To his credit, *Blade Runner* resolves its issues with the specific science fiction context it creates. Man merges with his creation. This new Adam and his genetically engineered Eve will become first father and mother of a new species. And they—we—have an ambiguous, ambivalent, violent rebel angel to thank for it.

If Roy Batty is Satan, Adam, and Christ all rolled into one, and Deckard is the human recipient of the replicant's redemptive/heroic mission, what are we left to conclude? Mainly that the allusions to *Paradise Lost*, to *Frankenstein*, and to other works similarly concerned with the question of what it means to be a person, allow *Blade Runner* itself to participate in the redemptive process....The replicants are products of technology and imagination...works of art made in our human image. Art, we may understand, can take on a life of its own beyond what its maker intended, but such a life can be positive. Such a work can possess innate qualities that improve our lives and make us whole. Art, whether it is the creation of 'replicants' or the creation of *Blade Runner*, holds out the possibility of transcendence. (Dresser: 178)

In opposition to such a reading, I am arguing that despite the scene in question, the film's meaning is a profoundly cynical and reactionary one. The hero's distaste for his job of killing escaped androids is contradicted by the film's sensuous and prolonged fascination with the depiction of those killings, even as his doubts are simplistically resolved in the happy ending. Three characters supposedly transcend their condition: the two "machines"—Rachel and Roy—and the human bounty-hunter, Deckard.

What Roy tells Deckard he has seen during his brief life does not completely confirm the renunciation of violence:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched sea beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain.

Time to die.

Roy spares Deckard in a recognition of life, and the above words point to his sense of beauty; but his first example—an expression of Scott's own aesthetics of violence—is a scene from the battlefield. How does this beauty differ from the slow-motion death of Zhora as she crashes through a series of plate glass windows after Deckard shoots her in the back?¹⁰

More importantly, this argument for redemption would be more convincing if Roy's death were the final scene, but it is followed by the flight of Deckard and Rachel into the sunset. It is interesting to see how the critics explain this final resolution: Dresser, above, writes that Deckard has "transcended his emotional aloofness...[making] the ultimate commitment" (p. 178); while for Kellner *et al.* this "symbiosis of humans and machines" is an indication that the film is not technophobic (p. 7): "The flight to an empathetic and romantic interior space away from the external realm of public callousness suggests a general human aversion to capitalist market values" (p. 8). I read the significance of the final scene very differently. Deckard is rewarded by the system he serves for his successful suppression of an armed revolt; while Rachel transcends her machine status by becoming a "real" woman—something which it is increasingly difficult for flesh and blood women to accept—namely, a submissive sex object, subject to her man's wishes and desires. Farfetched? The one exception to the absence of reasons why these machines should be built to resemble humans in the film lies in the replicant Pris's status as "a basic pleasure model"—an advanced sex doll. The importance of this latter theme in SF, as epitomized in Jeff Renner's "The Shortest Science Fiction Love Story Ever Written" ("Boy Meets Girl/Boy Loses Girl/Boy Builds Girl") as well as the fact that the other replicants have been built with specific functions, allow us to ask what other functions Rachel has been given.

The happy ending as well as the resolution which is identified by Dresser as "transcendence" have in this regard another meaning. In both film and novel Deckard carries on until all of the escaped replicants are dead. In the novel, these retirements were the source of the novel's ethical concerns:

'Don't you see? *There is no salvation.*'

'Then what's this for?' Rick demanded. 'What are you for?'

'To show you,' Wilbur Mercer said, 'that you aren't alone. I am here with

you and always will be. Go and do your task, even though you know it's wrong....You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe.' (15:119; italics in original. See also 22:158.)

In the film, however, in opposition to the somber ending of the novel, Deckard is not only rewarded for the risks he has undergone and for his reluctant exercise of violence in the maintenance of the status quo; the happy ending also absolves him of his doubts.

Finally, the possible redemption of the characters—human or machine—is made possible only by Roy's convenient death: he transcends his machine nature not by letting Deckard live, but by dying. The argument for transcendence (based on the renunciation of violence) falls apart if we ask what would have happened if Roy had not died (whether he spared Deckard's life or not). Deckard—or someone else—would have had to kill him. If Deckard had refused, he would not have been rewarded with the convenient overlooking of Rachel's continuing existence. She, too, would have been terminated.

Roy's renunciation and transcendence resemble the death of the villain in other narratives who repents as he lies dying. But as the comparison with black slaves suggests, Roy is not a villain. Although the replicants/escaped slaves analogy is made early in the film, the viewers' reactions towards them are carefully orchestrated so that we only fully sympathize with them once they are all dead! Roy's acquiescence and death remind us of the necessity of choosing between acceptance and rejection of the world as it is. Critics like Dresser speak of Roy's redemption insofar as it conforms to Christian salvation, which involves renunciation of attempts to change a flawed and oppressive world in return for a promised reward in the hereafter. The dove which Roy releases is a symbol of his soul, which ascends to heaven even as his body "dies." The character who represents an active threat to the status quo cannot be allowed to live, but in exchange for his voluntary death, Roy is offered a reward "greater than life itself": forgiveness for his mistaken rebellion and the promise of salvation in another life. On one level, critics like Dresser are right about Roy's transcendence in the film, but they have avoided spelling out its full meaning as an acceptance of the world as it is, and they have overlooked its violation of Dick's life and work.

Thus the question of our fascination with representations of violence is, in a sense, a false problem which points to a more profound deformation of the novel's original moral dilemma. In displaying at length the termination of the rebellious slaves, the film legitimizes the use of violence in defense of the status quo, even if that world is repressive and unjust. The film's violence can be seen, at least at the beginning, as the displaced expression and release of the spectator's anger at the abuses and waste of the present system. But this anger is gradually transferred in the film, from the wealthy—like Tyrell—to the exploited victims who dare to rebel. The robot workers who revolt against a system which exploits them and even denies them the status of "human" are hunted and killed with the complicity of the spectator. Yet

somehow, because the most vicious of them, in his own death, still aches with the pain of all that is denied him, the film is read as the expression of a generalized human transcendence.

This is the story, then, of the trajectory from book to film, a trajectory whose implications Dick himself resisted. The film's producers offered him \$400,000 if he would agree to suppress the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and allow it to be replaced by the screenplay of *Blade Runner*. Dick refused.¹¹

5. Much popular art serves to maintain the status quo by stimulating our repressed hopes and fears; and then, rather than permitting those awakened feelings to become knowledge or praxis, it sets out to defuse this nascent recognition of social contradiction by redirecting and draining off those threatening emotions. These representations of violence provide incomplete satisfaction for the anger and frustration we feel when confronted with a world of plenty in which science and technology and the fruits of human labor are squandered in the intensifying race for new forms of destruction. *Blade Runner* co-opts and redirects our rage from the political and economic structures responsible for this exploitation and waste to its victims. The film does this by merging in a single figure—that of the escaped replicants—both the *machines* which are used to exploit us and all *those who would refuse and rebel* against that system of exploitation. For although the androids are the target of that anger in the film, they are not its real cause. Our frustration and alienation stem not from the increasing presence of machines in our daily lives, but from the imperatives of production and consumption which those machines serve and from the human misuse and misapplication of technology. This can be seen in the fact that the characters—whether human or android—are not in control of their lives in the film. Deckard is forced out of retirement to hunt and retire replicants against his will, while the androids themselves are nothing more than slaves; and Rachel is the product of a cynical psycho-technological experiment. Paradoxically, the film identifies and nourishes our fantasies of refusal and revolt against a system which uses and manipulates us, by allowing us to empathize for a time with the four androids and their desperate rebellion. But as they are retired one by one, the film forcibly reminds us of the futility of struggle. Our frustration and resentment towards an order which increasingly turns to machines to exploit and control us is then displaced, from the human and societal source of that exploitation, to its victims, who are punished for their refusal of the impossible conditions of their existence. As opposed to the novel, which ends on a note of resignation with Deckard's acceptance of personal responsibility for human suffering, the film is a cynical denial of that message and of the major themes of Dick's book. Resistance to the status quo, however unjust the existing system is, will be punished, the film tells us, while the willingness to participate in the forcible maintenance of inequality and exploitation will be amply rewarded. The film ends with our first look at the world outside the dark, rainy city, as Deckard and his reward—his very own personal android, a grateful and subservient—and ageless!—sex doll, fly off into a *Playboy* sunset.

NOTES

1. The look of the film has interested critics in two ways: (a) for its portrayal of the near future "the densest, most arresting futuristic society in screen history" (Dempsey: 34); "a future city which perpetuates corporate capitalism's distinguishing features—urban decay, commodification, overcrowding, highly skewed disparities of wealth and poverty, and authoritarian policing. The film's urban images present a world where advanced capitalism's worst features have coalesced to produce a polluted, overpopulated city in a society controlled by giant corporations" (Kellner *et al.*: 6); and (b) as a blending of the conventions of SF and "film noir" (see Doll & Faller and Dresser).

2. Although many of the critiques of the film mention the novel, there is little extended comparison. The one exception is Wingrove's brief entry in his *Film Source Book*. On the other hand, Dick's critics have paid even less attention to the novel, accepting Suvin's judgment (p. 93) that it is one of the author's "outright failures." *Androids* is discussed in Robinson (pp. 90-93) and in Warrick ([1980], pp. 223-28; revised ed. [1983], pp. 205-09).

Despite my assertion that moral issues in the novel have been pushed to the background in the film, some critics do call attention to philosophical issues, particularly Dresser's "Science Fiction and Transcendence"—to which I shall return—and Telotte's "Human Artifice and the Science Fiction Film," in which he studies a "number of recent films which take as their major concern or as an important motive the potential doubling of the human body and thus the literal creation of a human artifice" (p. 44).

The development of Mercerism is an opening to the increasing use of transcendental themes by Dick in his late novels.

3. As opposed to this profit-motive explanation, Telotte argues in terms of the subjective motives of the replicants' creators:

Tyrell, it seems, is moved solely by his fascination with creating ever more perfect copies, replicants which can defy those tests for humanity which have developed in this future world....Sebastian has turned his engineering skills to no less subjective end [*sic*], the task of filling his lonely life with manufactured 'friends'.... (p. 48)

The important point—central to Telotte's article—lies in his attempt to analyze the fascination with "doubling":

As Arendt noted [in *The Human Condition*]*—and as our accomplishments in genetic engineering every day point up—we already possess the potential which science fiction films have so frequently described, that for crafting artificial versions of man. What these films hope to forestall is the dark obverse of this capacity, that for making human nature artificial as well.* (p. 51)

Corporate interests and machines which pass as humans are also an important element in Ridley Scott's earlier SF film, *Alien* (1979), where the science officer of the *Nostromo* is discovered to be an android and to have been acting against the interests of the humans on board. (See, on this matter, my 1980 essay and that by Thomas Byers in the present issue).

4. Without conducting a full review of the history of robots and androids (and their cousin, the computer), several points should be made. Even as the figure of the robot may point to actual technological developments, it is clear that it means much more. In general, one could speak of an opposition between *positive* images of the robot as the visible sign of the triumph of reason, the Enlightenment dream

of human progress, as well as a more immediate symbol of the liberation from drudgery; and *negative* visions, which, at least since *Frankenstein* (1818), have paralleled those same beliefs and hopes in technological progress.

While genealogies are always difficult (and there will always be someone with an earlier example), for many SF readers the theme of a robot "passing" for a human was introduced in Issac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950), and in particular in the story "Evidence" (1946). Set in the 21st century in the context of the anxieties of those who distrusted the increasing use of ever more sophisticated robots and computers, the story revolves around a politician who is accused of being a robot. In the larger context of *I, Robot*, this story is significant for its discussion of the moral dimension of the "Three Laws of Robotics" when juxtaposed to human morality.

Asimov's own positive attitudes about the liberating potential of technology are summed up in the final story ("Evitable Conflict"), which depicts a utopian future where the world is run by the "Machines"—the extensions of the "positronic brains" of the robots. (Note that in the early 1940s, there was still no commonly accepted word for the computer. It is usually associated with the work of Eckert and Mauchly and the development of the ENIAC [Electronic Numerical Integrator and Calculator] in 1946, followed by the UNIVAC [Universal Automatic Computer] in 1951. Asimov saw that the upper limit to the development of sophisticated robots lay in the area of what is now referred to as "artificial intelligence," so he posited the development of a "positronic brain" for his robots.)

Asimov's optimism is important in light of the shift in attitudes towards computers over the next decades. Along with a general distrust of technology following the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese, the computer came to be one of our most powerful images of government control (Fitting, 1979; 1980). And now, in the 1980s, there has been again a reversal in attitudes towards the computer, whose potentiality for control is increasingly subverted: in films like *Tron* (1982), *War Games* (1983), and the British television series *Max Headroom*; and of course in the writing of the so-called "cyber-punks," beginning with Vernor Vinge's *True Names* (1984) and reaching its apogee in the writing of William Gibson (*Neuromancer* [1985], *Count Zero* [1986], and the anthology *Burning Chrome* [1986]). This is the subject of a book in itself. For a discussion of the first two periods, see for instance, Patricia Warrick's book.

In the context of the robot as a figure for the liberation from drudgery, the rebellion of the machines in *Androids* should remind us that there is also another side to the meaning of the robot: as a figure of the increasing roboticization of the work process, not only in the increasing use of robots in the work place, but in the development of work processes—as epitomized by the assembly line—which rob the worker of individual choice by transforming him/her into a cog in the machine—as in Chaplin's classic film *Modern Times* (1936). The standard analysis of this transformation of the work process in the 20th century and the alienation of the worker is Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1974.) For an application of this issue to the robots of Asimov, see Portelli. In their article on *Blade Runner*, Kellner *et al.* briefly raise this issue.

5. "The android, which is the unauthentic human, the mere reflex machinery, is unable to experience empathy": Dick's 1978 comments (quoted in Dick [1987], V: 389) on his "The Little Black Box" (1964), a story which deals with Mercerism. For a further discussion of these themes, see Dick's Vancouver speech, "The Android and the Human"; see also the anthology of many of Dick's robot stories edited by Warrick and Greenberg.

6. I do not have the space here to discuss the increasing appearance of misogynist themes in Dick's writing—a theme which his critics, myself included, have avoided for too long. For a novel which also mixes a "predatory" female and a sympathetic humanoid robot, see his *We Can Build You* (1972). For a discussion of this issue in *Blade Runner*, see Barr.

7. The expression "fail-safe" is used during the briefing on the escaped replicants by Deckard's boss. The "andys" of the novel also have a four-year lifespan, but it is presented as a by-product of their manufacture rather than as an intentional limitation, and as such, it plays no part in the androids' motivations in the novel. There is some confusion in the film on this subject, for although Tyrell tells Roy that he cannot reverse the process, Rachel has been built with "no termination date."

8. Quoted in Sammon, p. 26. So far as I am aware, this particular difference is dealt with in only one of the articles on *Blade Runner*, David Wingrove's entry in his *Source Book*:

...the main difference, and the one that subverts the central theme of the novel, is in the treatment of the androids. Dick makes it clear that his androids, no matter how sympathetic some of them appear, are radically *evil* because they lack souls. The movie, ironically, takes a more *humanistic* approach to the androids, or Replicants, and presents them as victims of human evil. The Replicants are capable of murder but even so they emerge, by the end of the film, as *morally* as well as physically superior to their human hunters. (p. 40)

In his brief account, Wingrove goes no further in his explanation or interpretation, but it is interesting that in such a short account he would stress a point which most of the other critics simply overlooked. I shall return to this in my conclusion.

9. For an accurate sample of recent psychological studies of the effects of representations of violence, see the essays collected in Bryant & Zillman. For a critique of this research, see Thelma McCormak's "Making Sense of the Research on Pornography," in Burstyn, pp. 181-205. For a sensible discussion of the entire question, see Fraser's *Violence in the Arts*. Finally, for discussions of the question of how film moves the spectator, see the articles by Dyer and Mulvey.

My own approach is based on the work of Fredric Jameson, most specifically his "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and on the discussion of '50s monster movies at the end of his *Marxism and Form* (pp. 404-06). There, in a gloss on Susan Sontag's "Imagination of Disaster," he argues that the viewer's relationship to these films was caught up in contradictory feelings of anger and anticipation—anger at the society in which she or he was imprisoned and exploited, an anger which vented itself in the monsters' rampages. At the same time, glimpses of a repressed alternative could be seen both in the collective struggle against the monsters and in the figure of the scientist as an image of a non-alienated kind of work.

10. There is little depiction of the actual killing or "retirement" of the androids in the novel (Polkov, 8:65; Luft, 12:91; the Battys, 19:147; and Rachel 19:145). The increase in violence from novel to film cannot be explained by arguing that film, by its visual nature, emphasizes violence in the way a novel does not. Compare the violence in Mickey Spillane's *I, the Jury* with the 1953 film version, where the situation is almost reversed: the protracted brutality of the novel is almost completely missing from that film.

Moreover, not all violent films "aestheticize" violence in the way *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Clockwork Orange*, or *The Wild Bunch* do. A test case might be Pasolini's version of De Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* (Salo, 1975). For a sympathetic overview of low budget "gore (violence) and sexploitation" films, see the special issue of

Re/Search, "Incredibly Strange Films" (1986). For a powerful analysis of the progressive political dimension of horror films, see Robin Wood's "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in Britton *et al.*, pp. 7-28.

11. Sammon quotes Dick (p. 26) as follows:

I was offered a great deal of money, and a cut in the merchandizing rights, if I would do a novelization of the screenplay, or if I would let someone like Alan Dean Foster come in and do it....My Agent figured that I would make about \$400,000 from this deal.

But part of this package required the suppression of my original novel, and I said no....They got nasty again. They began to threaten to withdraw the logo rights—we wouldn't be able to say that my book was the novel on which *Blade Runner* was based....We remained adamant, though, and stuck to our guns, and they eventually caved in. In re-releasing the original novel I only made about \$12,500. But I kept my integrity. And my book.

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RÉSUMÉ

Peter Fitting. Futuroflics: la Neutralisation de la révolte dans Blade Runner. —A la fois dans ce qu'il fait voir et dans ce qui y manque, *Blade Runner* (1982) diffère de façon moralement significative du roman de Dick de 1968 sur lequel il est basé, *Robot Blues* (aussi traduit comme *Les androïdes rêvent-ils de moutons électriques?*). Le roman équilibrait de manière précaire deux thèmes en relation avec les androïdes ou «répliquants»: ceux-ci représentent les opprimés et les exploités des sociétés capitalistes tout en allégorisant le danger pour les hommes de devenir mécanisés. Le lien logique entre ces deux conceptions thématiques est fourni par le test d'empathie administré par Mercerism et ses aides comme critère permettant de distinguer les humains des androïdes. La version filmique de Ridley Scott omet entièrement Mercerism et humanise les «répliquants» plus que ne le fait Dick dans son livre ce qui exacerbe au bout du compte le problème que crée dans *Blade Runner* l'accent mis sur la violence dans la peinture de leur «liquidation». Le film fait naître des réactions de ressentiment et de colère contre un statu-quo répressif, mais il oriente finalement ces sentiments contre les entités mêmes qui se rebellent contre le système, alors même que la représentation de leur massacre doit persuader le spectateur de la vanité de leur rébellion. Cette «catharsis» singulière de l'hostilité à l'égard des abus et gaspillages du présent système social est en contradiction radicale avec le message qui s'exprimait dans *Robot Blues*. (RMP)

Abstract.—Both in what it shows and in what is absent from it, *Blade Runner* (1982) deviates in morally significant ways from the 1968 novel by Dick on which it is based. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? precariously balances two

themes connected with the "replicants": they represent the oppressed and exploited in capitalist society and at the same time embody the danger of humans becoming mechanized. The logical nexus between these two thematic ideas is provided by Mercerism and its attendant test for empathy as the factor distinguishing humans from androids. Ridley Scott's film version, on the other hand, omits Mercerism entirely; and while it "humanizes" the replicants more than Dick's book does, this finally exacerbates the problem arising from Blade Runner's emphasis on violence in its depiction of their "termination." The film does evoke feelings of resentment and anger against a repressive status quo; but it finally turns those feelings on the very entities rebelling against the system, even as its imaging of their violent deaths would persuade viewers of the futility of rebellion. This "catharsis" of antagonism towards the abuses and waste of the present system is radically at odds with Androids' message. (RMP)

Todd H. Sammons

Return of the Jedi: Epic Graffiti

1. Preliminaries. *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), the first two movies in the middle trilogy of George Lucas's ambitious nine-part *Star Wars* saga, cover the boyhood and adolescence, respectively, of the trilogy's hero, Luke Skywalker.¹ In *Return of the Jedi* (1983), the final episode of this trilogy, Luke reaches maturity. We should not be surprised, then, to realize that the *Star Wars* movies change along with their hero and that the differences among them follow a pattern that parallels that of Luke's growing up. *New Hope*, a movie about a boy, is cinematic folklore, drawing mainly on westerns and war movies to construct an optimistic, celebratory adventure story.² *Empire*, a movie about an adolescent, is cinematic myth, drawing mainly on Freud to construct a pessimistic, somber examination of primal anxieties.³ And *Jedi*, a movie about an adult, is cinematic epic, drawing on epic poetry as a fit conclusion to this part of Lucas's "intergalactic dream of heroism."⁴ In what follows, I discuss some problems connected with coupling *Return of the Jedi* and epic poetry, examine the epic analogues in *Jedi*, and then comment on the middle trilogy as a whole.⁵

There are five problems with looking at *Return of the Jedi* in terms of epic poetry. One is the objection that Lucas is not "epic-literate"; the second is the suspicion that the audience would miss the allusions; the third is the possible prematurity of talking about *Jedi* in terms of epic before the whole nine-part cycle is done; the fourth is the danger of overvaluing a merely popular movie by comparing it to acknowledged masterpieces of world literature; and the fifth is the impossibility of calling *Jedi* a true epic.

Though it is clear that Lucas knows more about film than about literature, we should not discount his literary knowledge, especially since we know that he read epics in preparing to write the *Star Wars* saga.⁶ Actually, however, I am not too concerned about the question of Lucas's knowledge of specific epics, because I am not interested here in how epic motifs got to Lucas. The plain fact—which I will establish below—is that they did. This is why I have used the words "motif" and "analogue" to characterize the relationship between *Jedi* and the various epics, since these words are elastic enough to mean "unconscious association" as well as "conscious allusion." I think, then, that Lucas knows enough about epic, from his own reading or from other channels of transmission, to have taken consciously or unconsciously what he needed for *Jedi* from the cornucopia of European epic poetry.⁷

Similarly, I am not overly concerned by the fact that most members of *Jedi*'s audience are probably even less "epic-literate" than Lucas. You do

not have to know where a particular motif comes from in order to respond to it. And again we must acknowledge a plain fact: *Jedi* evokes a powerful response from most of its audience. Granted, Lucas's skill as a filmmaker is responsible for a large part of this response. Nonetheless, I think that we should also impute part of *Jedi*'s evocative power to its tenacious epic motifs, still able to move us after all these years.

But since Lucas began the *Star Wars* cycle *in medias res*—a standard epic procedure⁸—shouldn't we wait until the nine-part saga is complete to talk about the epic motifs? Maybe we should, but in the meantime we can look closely at the individual movies, being alert to differences as well as similarities. And when we do, we discover that each movie does indeed differ from its predecessor(s). This is why I use "saga" and "cycle" to characterize the nine-part whole. Though the individual movies are part of a larger whole, they are discrete parts with their own logic rather than dependent units in an all-encompassing, carefully articulated structure.

Anyone who uses a "mainstream" work to illuminate *Jedi* or any other paraliterary text must confront the fourth problem: the difficulty of keeping out of the analysis interpretations and valuations derived from the mainstream work that are actually not germane to the paraliterary work. In other words, you can go wrong two ways: by seeing more than is really there and by overvaluing the paraliterary work merely because it is like a mainstream work. I have tried not to go wrong either of these ways, first by focussing on obvious epic motifs and analogues only and second by not letting my enthusiasm for epic poetry override my critical sense.

The last of the five problems is whether or not *Jedi* truly is an epic. I think not. It is too short, running a little over two hours versus at least ten hours' reading time for most epics.⁹ It has no narrator. It is too funny. At points it is much too cute. Finally, its intellectual content is thin, despite all the "philosophy" about the Force, and destiny, and choice.¹⁰ I have not just undermined my own position, however; for I am not trying to prove that *Jedi* is an epic, but that it is Lucas's attempt to transpose true epic into cinematic epic, just as he made *New Hope* a cinematic folktale and *Empire* a cinematic myth. Deciding—because Luke Skywalker has grown up—that *Jedi* should be more mature than *New Hope* or *Empire*, Lucas turns to images that can be traced to a more mature genre than the folktale or the myth: epic poetry. In fact, every single scene in *Jedi* has an analogue in the European epic tradition; for Lucas has used analogues from no less than eight epics written during a 2500-year span: Homer's *Odyssey* (8th century B.C.), Virgil's *Aeneid* (1st century B.C.), *Beowulf* (early 8th century A.D.), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (early 14th century), Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674).¹¹

Return of the Jedi begins with a converging of its main characters at Jabba the Hutt's palace. Han Solo, encased in carbonite, has been brought to Jabba by the bounty hunter Boba Fett. R2-D2 and C-3PO arrive with a message for Jabba from Luke Skywalker. Lando Calrissian is already there, disguised as a skiff guard. Princess Leia appears next, disguised as a bounty hunter with the captive Chewbacca in tow. And then Luke, in the garb of a

Jedi, strides in. After Han's rescue, the narrative briefly splits into two parts: Luke (with R2-D2) goes to Dagobah, the Millennium Falcon (with everyone else) goes to the rebel fleet's rendezvous. When Luke rejoins his comrades at the rendezvous, we follow a central action for a while: the infiltration of the forest moon by Han's strike team. Soon, however, Luke leaves the team in order to confront Darth Vader, and the narrative begins to maneuver among three sequences: Luke's confrontation with the Emperor, the strike team's attempt to deactivate the shield generator, and the rebel fleet's attack on the new Death Star. Despite this welter of individual scenes, however, *Jedi*'s structure is actually simple. The movie is divided into three main segments: the rescue of Han from Jabba's palace on Tatooine, Luke's return to Dagobah, and the infiltration of—and battle around—the forest moon of Endor. Epic analogues appear in all three of these segments.

2. Tatooine. The motif underlying the rescue of Han from Jabba the Hutt is the descent into the underworld. In Greek mythology, the reason for the descent is usually to retrieve someone close to the hero from the realm of the dead: Orpheus nearly recovers his wife, Eurydice; Theseus aids his friend Pirithous in trying to get Persephone as Pirithous's wife; and Hercules repays the kindness of Admetus by reclaiming Alcestis, Admetus's wife. Epic poetry also has its descents, though the reason epic protagonists brave the underworld is not to rescue anyone but to seek knowledge of their future. Both mythological and epic descents are heroic: only extraordinary human beings are allowed to visit (and return from) the underworld before they have died. In *Jedi*, Luke retrieves a friend from the underworld and finds out about his future, though Lucas separates these two aspects of the descent motif. Luke finds out about his future later, when he gets to Dagobah. On Tatooine, Luke succeeds in rescuing Han from bondage to Jabba, who is, at least punningly, an "underworld" figure, being "the vilest *gangster* in the galaxy" (Kahn 1:7; my emphasis).¹²

Many details up through the battle at Sarlaac's pit reinforce the descent motif. At the beginning, R2-D2 and C-3PO trudge along a dusty road towards Jabba's palace, looming evilly on the horizon. The scene becomes Dantesque when the massive iron palace door slams shut behind them: as C-3PO glances back, we can almost see the motto "LAY DOWN ALL HOPE, YOU THAT GO IN BY ME" emblazoned above the door, as it is above the entrance to Dante's *Inferno* (in Sayers's translation, 3.9:85).¹³ But unlike Dante the pilgrim, who has a friendly Virgil to guide him through the *Inferno*, R2-D2 and C-3PO are taken by Bib Fortuna, an unfriendly, "inelegant major-domo" (Kahn 1:9) and a despicable sycophant, to the Satan of this Hell: Jabba the Hutt. In fact, Jabba's grotesque immobility—he is so obese that he must use a powered dais to move around—recalls that of Dante's Satan, a three-headed monster wedged in ice at the very bottom of the funnel-shaped *Inferno*.

After R2-D2 delivers Luke's hologrammic message to Jabba, the "droids" are led through Jabba's dungeon to "either the boiler room, or programmed hell" (Kahn 1:13), under the direction of EV-9D9, Chief of Cyborg Operations. In both Virgil and Dante, the underworld is overseen

by Rhadamanthus, a judge who allocates the newly dead their places. The Rhadamanthine Ninedenine makes C-3PO Jabba's new interpreter and assigns R2-D2 to duty on Jabba's Sail Barge. And lest we miss the *Inferno* motif, Ninedenine's realm includes two droids being tortured: one by being dismembered; the other (suspended head downwards) by having hot iron applied to its feet.¹⁴

Jabba is not impressed with Luke's message. Nor is he fooled for long by Leia's disguise as a bounty hunter. He is, however, a Pluto figure who keeps beautiful women in his underworld against their will—first Oola, the lovely green-skinned dancer whom he feeds to a monster, the Rancor, when she refuses to sit by him; and then Leia. But Leia is much more than Proserpine to Jabba's Pluto. She is also Marfisa, a female warrior in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Like the "hastie" Marfisa (*Orlando* 46.41.2),¹⁵ Leia is feisty, always readier to do something than talk about it. When Leia takes off her mask to reveal herself to Han, whom she has freed from the carbonite in which he has been frozen since near the end of *Empire*, she is like Marfisa (or Bradamante, another female warrior in *Orlando Furioso*) all those times when she pulls off her helmet and her cascading tresses reveal her to be a woman. Leia is captured and made into a concubine for Jabba, as Mandricardo wants Marfisa to be for Rodomonte (see *Orlando* 26.50). In *Jedi*, Leia finds out that she is Luke's sister, just as Marfisa finds out in *Orlando Furioso* that she is Ruggiero's sister (*Orlando* 36.56-65). One critic hostile to Leia in *Empire* claims that she is Lucas's bow towards the National Organization of Women (Grenier: 58). But Leia is actually the latest in a line of powerful woman warriors, a line that stretches from Virgil's Camilla to Spenser's Britomart and includes Tasso's Clorinda as well as Ariosto's Marfisa and Bradamante.

The first attempts to rescue Han have failed. R2-D2 and C-3PO now belong to Jabba. Han and Chewbacca are locked in one of Jabba's dungeons. Lando is hovering around ineffectively. And Leia, dressed in a skimpy harem costume, is chained to Jabba. As often happens in romantic epic, second-rank knights cannot accomplish a task reserved for a first-rank knight—in this case, Luke Skywalker. Luke's appearance for the first time in *Jedi* recalls another aspect of the descent motif: the hero's gaining magical assistance (as Aeneas does from the Sybil, e.g.) prior to the descent proper. Luke's "magic," however, comes from his being a Jedi adept, able to control the Force. He is his own Sybil: we get the feeling that the palace gates open at his command; he easily brushes aside the Gamorrean guards who block his way; and he gains entry to Jabba's audience chamber by using a Jedi mind trick on Bib Fortuna.

Luke's verbal sparring with Jabba about Han's release—Luke promising retribution if Jabba refuses; Jabba laughing at Luke's presumption—is analogous to epic flyting, the speeches (sometimes courteous but more often derogatory and inflammatory) that warriors exchange before they fight. Moreover, after Jabba deposits Luke in the Rancor's pit, we are reminded of three different epics. Luke defeats the Rancor by using his brains, the way Odysseus defeats Polyphemos.¹⁶ The monster itself could be Grendel or Grendel's dam.¹⁷ And when Luke sticks a bone in the Rancor's

mouth, we recall Orlando's using an anchor to prop open the mouth of an orc to whom the Ebudans have fed Olympia, one of the distressed damsels in *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁸

Details reminiscent of the battle prowess of epic heroes appear in the next scene, which moves from Jabba's palace outside to the Dune Sea of Tatooine. The heroes are still in trouble, about to be given to Sarlaac, another monster to whom Jabba enjoys feeding enemies. Though this whole sequence is patterned on pirate movies,¹⁹ the battle has its epic moments. One motif puts an epic hero alone inside his enemy's camp or fortress—Virgil's Turnus in the middle of the Trojan camp (*Aeneid*, Bk. 9) or Ariosto's Rodomonte in the middle of Charlemagne's Paris (*Orlando*, Bks. 14, 16-18). Similarly, Luke is fighting by himself amid his enemies: Han is still nearly blind from hibernation sickness; Lando winds up being knocked off the skiff; Chewbacca is busy holding on to Han, who is dangling off the skiff's edge and trying to grab Lando before Lando slides down the sandbank and into Sarlaac's gullet; and Leia is still chained to Jabba. Also, epic heroes in their battle-fury seem invincible, able to do astonishing feats of killing. In this scene, Luke is invincible. He dispatches all of the guards on the prisoners' skiff, ripostes the two best thrusts of his most dangerous adversary (the bounty hunter Boba Fett), leaps onto the second skiff and kills its guards, then boards and destroys the Sail Barge. And while all of this is going on, Jabba, distracted, neglects to keep his eye on Leia, who proves that female warriors are dangerous even if dressed in skimpy harem outfits: she chokes Jabba to death by wrapping her chain around his neck.

3. Dagobah. Luke's journey from Tatooine to Dagobah after Jabba's demise takes him from one of the worst places in the *Star Wars* universe to one of the best. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante the pilgrim and his guide, Virgil, emerge from the gloom and horror of the Inferno into the light and joy of Purgatory. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the famous paean to light occurs at the beginning of Book III (which is set in Heaven) after we have spent the first two books trapped with Satan in Hell. Similarly, Dagobah is an oasis, a place to recover from a horrifying, exhausting experience. Dagobah is also where the hero's and the viewer's most fundamental questions are answered.

These questions are two. First, is Darth Vader really Luke's father? And, second, if he is, how is this possible since in *New Hope* Obi-Wan states unequivocally that Luke's father "was betrayed and murdered...by a very young Jedi named Darth Vader" (Lucas 5:80)? Just before Yoda dies in *Jedi*, he reveals the answer to the first question: yes, Darth Vader really is Luke's father. And right after Yoda's death, Obi-Wan himself answers the second question: "Your father was seduced by the dark side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed. So what I have told you was true...from a certain point of view" (*The Art...*, p. 56).

Some might see this entire scene as a clumsy maneuver to deal with a narrative inconsistency between *New Hope* (in which Obi-Wan implies that Luke's father and Darth Vader are different people) and *Empire* (in which

Darth Vader claims to be Luke's father). But looked at in terms of its epic analogues, the scene turns out to have an important function in *Jedi*, a function signalled by its placement between the two important heroic actions in the movie: the rescue of Han from Jabba and the rescue of the galaxy from the new Death Star.

When epic heroes descend into the underworld, they receive knowledge that enables them to persevere after they return to the "upperworld." Odysseus finds out what he must do to appease Poseidon's wrath. Aeneas, having witnessed a procession of figures from Roman history, realizes that the empire he is founding will be worth the struggle. Dante the pilgrim sees vividly the results of the choices that he will make during his terrestrial existence. Both Bradamante and Britomart learn about their illustrious descendants (the House of Este and the kings of Britain, respectively [*Orlando* 3.17 and *Faerie Queene* 3.3]), the remembrance of whom sustains them on their quests for their husbands (Ruggiero and Arthegall). And before Milton's Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, the archangel Michael shows Adam the tragic panorama of human history and instills in him the main lesson to be learned from it: to endure life on Earth by having faith in the saving power of the Son of God.

Like his epic forebears, Luke needs something to sustain him during his struggle against the Empire. After the twin shocks of finding out for sure who his father is and watching Yoda die, Luke is unable to continue. As he tells R2-D2, "I can't do it, Artoo. I can't go on alone" (*The Art...*, p. 56). Obi-Wan's appearance at just the right time—when the hero's doubts have peaked—resolves Luke's paralysis. Luke is not alone. Obi-Wan and Yoda are still with him, and he discovers that he has a twin sister, Leia. But although Obi-Wan frees Luke to act, he reaffirms what Yoda had told Luke earlier: in order to become a full-fledged Jedi Knight, Luke must face Darth Vader.

The Dagobah interlude is therefore more than just a chance for Luke to catch his breath. He is now like many epic heroes and heroines, free to act in the present because he is secure in his knowledge of the past and willing to trust in what a seer has shown to be his future. No longer dependent on either Yoda or Obi-Wan, who reappear only at the very end of *Jedi*, Luke in the next scene can stride into the rebel briefing, confidently proclaiming, "I'm with you, too!" (*ibid.*, p. 64). Dagobah, the still point between Luke's triumphs over Jabba and the Emperor, gives Luke what he needs in order to act: an identity and a destiny.

4. Endor. Three scenes, each one with an epic analogue, occur before Han's strike team lands on the forest moon of Endor. When the rebels gather for the briefing by Mon Mothma, Admiral Akbar, and General Madine, we are at an epic war council, whose task is to decide the next move in the campaign. When Han gives Lando the Millennium Falcon, we see that in *Jedi*, as well as in romantic epic, good equipment is a necessary adjunct of heroic valor and skill:²⁰ Lando is a fine warrior, but his chances of knocking out the main reactor of the new Death Star are improved a great deal by Han's gift of his "steed," "the fastest ship in the fleet" (*The Art...*, p. 66). And when

Han maneuvers the stolen Imperial shuttle past the blockade around the Endor moon, we are with the Greeks inside the Trojan horse as it is being wheeled into Troy.²¹

On the moon itself, we experience one of the most exciting sequences in *Jedi*: the rocket-bike chase scene. After Han, sneaking up on two Imperial scouts, steps on a twig and alerts them, one escapes and Luke and Leia clamber onto his partner's bike in order to pursue him. The other *Star Wars* movies also have chase scenes: in *New Hope* the rebel pilots, followed by Darth Vader and his two wingmen, fly down a trench towards the small thermal port that is the only weakness in the Death Star; and in *Empire* Han takes the Millennium Falcon into an asteroid field in order to evade the Imperial fleet hot on his tail. All three scenes are particularly good examples of *Star Wars* "maraviglia," a term Tasso uses to describe the non-realistic marvels that give pleasure to the epic audience.²² Lucas substitutes special effects for the sorcery of romantic epic.

Several more analogues appear in the next section of the movie. After Luke gets his own "mount" during the rocket-bike chase, Leia dives off her bike just before it crashes. She then meets Wicket, an Ewok scout, and soon she is in the Ewoks' arboreal village, dressed in their equivalent of royal garb—a captive, but an honored captive. The analogue here is to Spenser when Una, having been separated from the Red Cross Knight, is rescued from Sansloy by satyrs (*Faerie Queene* 1.6) and worshipped—first for her beauty and then for her wisdom.

Luke, meanwhile, has returned to the strike team without Leia. After a frantic search turns up only the wreckage of her speeder bike, Han, Luke, Chewbacca, R2-D2, and C-3PO are snared in an Ewok net and, like Leia, taken captive. Unlike Leia, though, they are bound to poles and ignominiously carried to the Ewok village—except for C-3PO, who, since the Ewoks take him to be some kind of god, travels enthroned. The Ewoks' deification of C-3PO fits in nicely with the Spenser analogue: when Una makes the satyrs understand that she does not wish to be worshipped, they fall to worshipping the ass she has been riding on instead (*Faerie Queene* 1.6.19).

The Ewoks may look cuddly, but they have decided to barbecue our heroes for a feast honoring C-3PO. Once more Luke's handling of a threatening situation recalls the confident ingenuity of Odysseus. Earlier, when Han is about to start blasting away at the Ewoks, Luke says, "Han, don't. It'll be all right" (*The Art...*, p. 87). Luke makes good on his promise right before the Ewoks light the wood pile under Han. After having the multilingual C-3PO tell the Ewoks that he will use his magic if they do not release his friends, Luke uses the Force to levitate C-3PO. Impressed, the Ewoks free Han, Luke, Chewbacca, and R2-D2. The critic who wondered "why Luke does not simply untie himself and the others, given his powers" (Asahina: 19) misses the point entirely. Luke uses the Force cleverly—to cement C-3PO's status as a deity. Luke is interested not in escaping from but in recruiting the Ewoks. Like Odysseus, one of whose most important qualities is foresight, Luke is thinking ahead.

The Odysseus analogue continues in the next scene. During a meeting of the Ewok Council of Elders, C-3PO "pantomimes a short history of the

Galactic Civil War" (*The Art...*, p. 94). He is like Odysseus at the palace of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians, or Aeneas at Dido's Carthage. Both Odysseus and Aeneas have been shipwrecked and reveal who they are and why they merit aid by telling their stories to their hosts (*Odyssey*, Bks. 9-12; *Aeneid*, Bks. 2-3). C-3PO is a spellbinding storyteller. He knows Ewokese, and he can also imitate any sound he wants: TIE fighters, the explosion of the Death Star, Imperial Walkers, Darth Vader's breathing. Moreover, like Odysseus and Aeneas, C-3PO succeeds: the rebels are made part of the tribe and in the morning the tribe's scouts will show them the fastest way to the shield generator base.

Though Luke is happy to have gained the Ewoks as allies, he is still struggling to deal with the knowledge, presented him by Yoda and Obi-Wan on Dagobah, that his father is Darth Vader and that his destiny is to confront Vader. When Leia joins him on a walkway outside Chief Chirpa's hut, he tells her that Vader is his father, that he has decided to face Vader, and that Vader is Leia's father as well. The resolution to one of the main problems in *Jedi* is foreshadowed here; for the sexual tension among Leia, Luke, and Han disappears when Leia tells Han that she is Luke's sister.²³ This motif appears in Ariosto and Spenser. In *Orlando Furioso*, Bradamante's anger with her fiancé, Ruggiero, over his supposed infidelity with Marfisa evaporates once they all find out that Ruggiero and Marfisa are twins; and in *The Faerie Queene*, Book 4, the image of perfect friendship is an interrelationship of four people: two men (Cambell and Triamond) and two women (Canacee and Cambina). The two men are friends. The two women are friends. Cambell and Canacee are brother and sister. Triamond and Cambina are brother and sister. Cambell and Cambina marry. Triamond and Canacee marry. *Jedi* resolves its "triangle" in exactly the same way: Han and Luke are friends, Leia and Luke turn out to be twins, and at the end of the movie it looks as if Leia and Han finally will be married.

At this point *Jedi*'s narrative splits into three parts: Luke's confrontation with the Emperor and Vader, the strike team's attack on the shield generator base, and the rebel fleet's attack on the Death Star. The relationship between the guerrilla- and fleet-battles on the one hand and Luke's struggle with the Emperor and Vader on the other mirrors the method of Renaissance allegory as practiced by Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser. These poets discriminate between—and interrelate—private and public actions or virtues. Ariosto's two main themes are love (private) and war (public). Tasso's Christian army completes the public task of recovering Jerusalem while at the same time allegorically "standing for" the functioning of an individual human psyche.²⁴ Spenser planned a 24-book epic, the first 12 books on the private virtues and the second 12 on the public virtues.²⁵ In *Jedi*, Luke's encounter with Vader and the Emperor represents allegorically Luke's internal struggle, opposed but related to the external struggles of the strike force and fleet.²⁶ The epic qualities of the exterior battles need no comment. Not so obvious are the epic analogues which occur in a small, quiet room inside the Death Star, a setting nicely calculated to represent the interiority of Luke's struggle.

The Emperor plans to seduce Luke by getting him to give in to his hate; for, as Yoda told Luke earlier, Luke must be wary of "anger, fear, aggres-

sion. The dark side are they. Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny" (*The Art...*, p. 55). At first, the Emperor's plan succeeds. Though Luke tries to quell his anger, the Emperor taunts him into losing control. Luke's "lightsaber flies into his hand" (*ibid.*, p. 129) and he swivels to kill the Emperor—only to have his stroke blocked by the blade of his father's lightsaber. What Yoda, Obi-Wan, and the Emperor have foreseen has come to pass: Luke is fighting Darth Vader.

Ironically, this climactic fight ends as both sides of the Force wish. Unable to keep Vader from reading his mind and discovering that Leia is Vader's daughter, Luke is goaded into a furious onslaught that ends in his beating Vader down and striking off Vader's right hand. The crisis of Luke's destiny is upon him. As Yoda and Obi-Wan had hoped, Luke has become a Jedi Knight by defeating his father. Likewise, the Emperor's machinations culminate as he calls for Luke to kill Vader: "fulfill your destiny and take your father's place at my side!" (*ibid.*, p. 139). Luke has beaten the Emperor's champion and is offered the conquered knight's place.²⁷ The temptation is real. In the movie's finest single moment, Luke stares down at his black-gloved mechanical hand and watches—horrified—as it clenches powerfully, Vader-like.²⁸ Poised on the threshold of the dark side, Luke realizes that if he takes another step in the wrong direction, he is lost. But the Emperor has miscalculated. Choosing to be a Jedi like Anakin Skywalker rather than like Darth Vader, Luke refuses to join the dark side. And he nearly dies for that choice.

Luke is not, however, the only Jedi in the throne room who must choose. In the scene with Leia outside Chief Chirpa's hut, Luke claims that "there is good in him [Vader]. I've felt it. He won't turn me over to the Emperor. I can save him. I can turn him back to the good side" (*ibid.*, p. 96). Luke is partly wrong, of course, since Vader does bring Luke to the Emperor. Ultimately, though, Luke is right about the good he feels in his father. As the Emperor, enraged by Luke's refusal to embrace the dark side, pours coruscating energy bolts into the young Jedi, Vader manages to pick up the Emperor and hurl him headlong to his death down the shaft at the center of the throne room.²⁹ It is an incredible moment, as if Turnus had joined Aeneas, Rodomonte killed Agramante, or Satan repented. Though literature has many falls into sin, it has few ascents to goodness—except in romantic epic, that is, where it is always possible for a pagan to become a Christian. In Ariosto, Marfisa converts when she discovers that relatives of Agramante, the pagan king she has been serving, had mistreated her parents (*Orlando* 38.12-24). And Tasso provides us with a conversion just as incredible as Vader's when Armida, a pagan sorceress, becomes Rinaldo's Christian wife (*Gerusalemme*, Bk. 20). Though not expressed in Christian terms, *Jedi* opts for the same ideas as do these Christian epics: that human beings have free will and that no one is completely evil. In other words, even Darth Vader can be saved.

One of the most compelling analogues between *Jedi* and epic poetry occurs during the final moments of the Death Star. In Book 2 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil illustrates the Roman concept of *pietas* (duty towards family, country, and the gods). As Troy burns around him, Aeneas escapes with his

father (whom he is carrying on his back), his son (whose hand he is clasping), and the *lares* (which his father is carrying). The emblematic triad of grandfather (Anchises), father (Aeneas), and son (Ascanius) represents Aeneas's carrying out his duty towards his family. His leaving the city represents his duty towards his country, since his destiny is to found a New Troy (Rome) on the shores of the Tiber, not to die futilely defending the Old Troy from the Greeks. And remembering to take the images of the gods with him represents his religious piety. In *Jedi*, Luke is also *pious*. Just as Aeneas carried his father out of the fallen Troy, so Luke manages to get his father's body out of the crumbling Death Star. And in saving himself, Luke serves his country (the Rebel Alliance) and the "gods" (the Force).

Epics end by suggesting losses and new beginnings. By killing Hector, Achilles ensures the Greek victory. By slaughtering the suitors, Odysseus recovers his kingdom and his wife. By butchering Turnus, Aeneas inaugurates Roman history. By waking up after the Beatific Vision, Dante the pilgrim starts the rest of his life. By stabbing an unyielding Rodomonte, Ruggiero removes a challenge to his recent marriage. By taking Jerusalem, Charles provides hope for all of the Crusaders after him. And after their expulsion from Eden, Milton's Adam and Eve begin humanity's journey through fallen history towards salvation. Similarly, *Jedi* ends with a loss and a new beginning. In Book 5 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas buries his father, Anchises. In *Jedi*, Luke lights the funeral pyre on top of which is Darth Vader's corpse—but this sad scene is embedded in a celebration. Ewoks and rebel strike force members are dancing around bonfires; fireworks light up the skies above the forest moon; Anakin Skywalker, Darth Vader no longer, has joined Yoda and Obi-Wan as an effulgent bearer of the Force. And when we see five generations of heroes sharing the screen—the past of Yoda, Obi-Wan (Yoda's student), and Anakin (Obi-Wan's student); the present of Luke and Leia (Anakin's children) and Han; and the future suggested by the imminent marriage of Han and Leia—we are reassured that, finally, all is well in the epic world.

5. The Saga to date. We are now in a position to look at the middle trilogy of the *Star Wars* saga as a whole. What we see first are three very different movies.

In *New Hope*, Lucas draws heavily on westerns and war movies. Tatooine is not just Frank Herbert's desert planet, Dune, but also a Great Plains state, where homesteading farmers eke out their precarious existence. While chasing down a runaway steer (R2-D2), a young farmer (Luke Skywalker) is knocked unconscious by Indians (Sandpeople), then rescued by a wily Indian fighter (Obi-Wan Kenobi). When the bad guys (Imperial stormtroopers), masquerading as Indians, slaughter the young farmer's family (Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen), he decides to revenge their deaths on the man responsible (Darth Vader). He and the Indian fighter go to a frontier town (Mos Eisley spaceport) and seek help at a saloon, where the Indian fighter again saves the young farmer. At the saloon, they find a gunslinging rustler with a price on his head (the smuggler Han Solo) and his sidekick (Chewbacca the Wookiee), who agree to help them—for a price, of course.

After the rustler guns down a bounty hunter (Grido, working for Jabba the Hutt) and the young farmer sells his horse (his landspeeder), the “good guys” barely escape.

From this point on, *New Hope* exchanges its cowboys-and-Indians setting for a space-age version of World War II. The young hero, the wily Indian fighter, the gunslinger, and the sidekicks become guerrillas rescuing an important underground courier (Princess Leia) from a Gestapo prison (the Death Star) and delivering vital information (the technical data on the Death Star) to the Resistance. At the tail end of this rescue, in a sequence Lucas admits he cobbled from innumerable World War I and World War II cinematic dogfights (Scanlon: 48), the Millennium Falcon becomes a B-17 dueling with Messerschmidts as Han and Luke man the ball-turret gun-mounts. And the final battle, pitting fighters against the granddaddy of all Japanese battleships (the Death Star again), could be the Battle of Midway, where American torpedo planes (the rebel fighters are armed with “proton torpedoes”) defeated a task force of the Japanese Imperial Navy.

As this plot summary shows, *New Hope* borrows heavily from the folklore of the American West and World War II. The difference between it and *Empire* is the difference between a happy, action-oriented, optimistic folktale and a somber, psychological, pessimistic myth.³⁰ At the end of *New Hope*, Luke blasts the Death Star to sparkling smithereens. At the end of *Empire*, an immensely powerful armored man towers over his small, defenseless son and cuts off his son’s hand. In that hand is a rod (Luke’s lightsaber), the father’s potent gift that the son has been using desperately against the father. No one can miss the symbolic castration here, which also completes *Empire*’s pattern of references to various primal anxieties: the fear of being eaten alive (the Wampa), the fear of being dismembered (C-3PO’s dismemberment by the stormtroopers in the Cloud City), the fear of suffocation (Darth Vader strangling Imperial admirals who fail him), the fear of falling (Luke casting himself down the reactor shaft), and the fear of being abandoned by one’s mother (Leia is separated from Luke for most of the movie) (see Gordon: 315-17). So while *Empire* retains much of the external minutiae of the *Star Wars* universe as well as the breakneck pace of *New Hope*, defeat replaces success and Freud becomes the movie’s presiding deity.³¹

As we have seen, in *Jedi* Lucas moves beyond folklore and myth to epic; for Luke Skywalker, the middle trilogy’s protagonist, moves beyond the youthful folkloric hero in *New Hope* and the troubled mythic hero in *Empire* to the mature epic hero in *Jedi*. By the end of his *Bildungsroman*, Luke has become an adult who knows his identity and destiny—i.e., who he is and what he has to do.

6. Conclusions. Although I think that the three *Star Wars* movies differ, I do not wish to overstate the case; for they share one striking similarity. The title of Lucas’s first commercial success—*American Graffiti* (1973)—provides us with the key to this similarity. Lucas fabricates his movies out of graffiti, out of bits and pieces of this and that, found in various places and given unity by his own artistic vision. In *American Graffiti*, for instance,

Lucas puts 44 pre-1963 rock-and-roll songs on the sound track of a movie whose action lasts one evening. In *New Hope* he has ransacked his memory for what it contains about comics, pulp fiction, SF, 20th-century history, and, most important, westerns and war movies. And in *Empire*, at least according to one critic, Lucas "'upgrade[d]' his work intellectually... giv[ing] himself a crash course in mythology, anthropology, and psychology, reading ancient myth, classical epics, folk tales, the Arthurian cycle, *chansons de geste*, tales of all the ancient heroes, mythic or legendary, throwing in lumps (no doubt from secondary sources) of *Paradise Lost*, *Suhrab and Rustam*, Freud, Jung, Yoga, Zen (California school)" (Grenier: 59).

We can see, then, that Lucas is a graffiti artist. Though his graffiti are not overtly scatological, sexual, or political,³² they are public, corporate, and expressive of his own personality: his films have been seen by millions; contain images, ideas, and motifs borrowed from many different people; and bear the impress of their creator. Interestingly, Lucas himself has said that "I look at art, all of art, as graffiti" (Scanlon: 47), which suggests that he is aware of how indebted he is to a "graffiti aesthetic."³³

In *Jedi*, Lucas remains true to his preferred aesthetic by using the epic analogues in *Jedi* the same way he uses songs in *American Graffiti*, westerns and war movies in *New Hope*, and Freud in *Empire*: to provide the movie with a consistent tone. In fact, *Return of the Jedi* could be subtitled *Epic Graffiti*. It is not really an epic but epic *manqué*, the "epic" tone guaranteed by the pastiche³⁴ of epic motifs discussed above: the descent to the underworld, the female warrior, the clever triumph over a monster, heroic invincibility, the discovery of identity and destiny, "maraviglia," recruiting allies by narrating one's history, a hidden family tie that resolves sexual tension, external battles and interior struggles, surprising conversions, piety, and loss leading to a new beginning.³⁵

NOTES

1. For a description of all three trilogies, see Gerald Clarke, "The Empire Strikes Back!" *Time*, 19 May 1980, p. 69. Basically, the first three movies will deal with "the fall of the republic and the rise of the empire." The middle three movies—*Star Wars: A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*—"center on Luke Skywalker." And "the last three episodes involve the rebuilding of the republic."

2. See Anne Lancashire, "The Star Wars Saga: Comedy versus Tragedy," *Dalhousie Review*, 62 (1982):5-13—"A *New Hope* is about mankind's seemingly unlimited potential...for goodness and for greatness" (p. 6).

3. For details about primal anxieties in *Empire*, see Martin Miller & Robert Sprich, "The Appeal of *Star Wars*: An Archetypal-Psychoanalytic View," *American Imago*, 38 (1981):203-20; and Gordon.

4. The quotation is from *Sight and Sound*, 46 (1976-77):31.

5. I wrote this essay before reading two very different but extremely interesting essays: Andrew Gordon's "Return of the Jedi—The End of the Myth," *Film Criticism*, 8, no. 2 (1984):45-54; and Anne Lancashire's "Return of the Jedi—Once More with Feeling," *ibid.*, pp. 55-66. Basically, Gordon argues that *Jedi* fails to measure up to *New Hope* and *Empire*, while Lancashire sees *Jedi* as a

stunning conclusion to the trilogy. Overall, I side with Lancashire rather than with Gordon: though Gordon is a useful check on Lancashire's exaggerated claims for *Jedi*, I do not find, as he does, that *Jedi* is inferior to the other two *Star Wars* movies. Lancashire notices, in passing, that Luke in Jabba's palace is on "the traditional epic journey to the underworld" (p. 58). More important, she discusses at greater length than I do the developmental pattern in the trilogy: youth in *New Hope*, adolescence in *Empire*, and maturity in *Jedi*. Our differences stem mainly from different focusses: she shows how *Jedi* relates to *New Hope* and *Empire* by tracing the internal connections among all three films, while I trace the connections between *Jedi* and its main external sources—Western European epic poetry.

6. Scanlon, p. 43; Grenier, p. 59; and Gerald Clarke, "In the Footsteps of Ulysses," *Time* (19 May 1980), p. 70.

7. The problem of the authorship of the *Star Wars* movies (is the author the producer? the director? the screenwriter?) is simplified by the fact, attested to by virtually everyone who has worked on the movies, that George Lucas is the ultimate authority on the *Star Wars* universe. Moreover, while *Empire* is the *Star Wars* movie least directly influenced by Lucas during its shooting, Lucas did play a paramount role in its scripting.

8. Unlike the *Iliad*, where the action begins at the beginning and is narrated sequentially through to the end, the *Odyssey* starts towards the end of Odysseus's ten-year journey home after the fall of Troy. We learn about most of Odysseus's wanderings in a "flashback" narrated by Odysseus himself at the request of the Phaeacian king, Alcinous, after which Odysseus returns to Ithaka and kills Penelope's suitors. Virgil in the *Aeneid* and Milton in *Paradise Lost* use a similar procedure. For a discussion of *in medias res* in the *Star Wars* movies, see Wyatt, pp. 601-02. In the same article, Wyatt discusses the "epicality" of *New Hope* and *Empire*.

9. Patrick Parrinder, in his *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* (London & NY, 1980), has a section on "truncated epic" in his chapter on "Science Fiction as Epic." One of Parrinder's main points in this section is that futurological SF novels cannot risk the elaboration of detail common to epic poems, because "the greater the wealth of fictional incident, the greater the reader's awareness is likely to be that he is faced not with logical necessity but with hypothetical, and often gratuitous, fantasy" (p. 93). Parrinder here asserts for all futurological SF novels my claim about *Jedi*: that they are not truly epic.

10. In *The English Epic and Its Background* (London, 1954), pp. 4-13, E.M.W. Tillyard argues that four qualities make up the epic spirit: (1) high quality and high seriousness, (2) amplitude, breadth, inclusiveness, (3) artistic control, and (4) a choric element ("The epic writer must express the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his own time": p. 12). *Jedi* meets none of these criteria, though it almost meets the third.

11. The dates I give for the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf* are the accepted conjectural dates of composition for these two works. Also, though I will quote from or refer to the editions of Dante, Ariosto, and Milton listed in the "Works Cited," citations for the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, Virgil, Tasso, and Spenser are from no specific editions.

12. The alert reader may wonder why I mention the mythological aspects of the descent motif when I am supposed to be discussing only the epic analogues. My first reason for doing so is that, as I have pointed out, myth and epic share the descent motif. Second, as I will show, the Tatooine episode is much more epic than mythological. And, third, since *Empire* and *Jedi* are more closely tied together than *New Hope* and *Empire*, we can see the mythological element in this opening scene as transitional: the mythic *Empire* blending into the epic *Jedi*.

13. The citation form is canto.line.page. The relatively easy entry and the slamming shut of the door might also recall what the Sybil says to Aeneas before his descent to the underworld: the descent is easy but the return difficult (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.125-29).

14. In the third ring of the eighth circle of the Inferno, simoniacs (those who sell holy things) are punished by being plunged head-first in rock while flames play around their feet (Dante, *Inferno* 19.22-30).

15. McNulty, p. 547. McNulty's is an edition of Sir John Harington's 1591 translation. Since Harington frequently compressed or expanded Ariosto's Italian, my stanza citations, which are to McNulty's edition, will not always match the original.

16. Odysseus outwits Polyphemos (Book 9) by poking out the giant's one eye and then tying his men and himself underneath the Cyclops's goats. When the now-blind Polyphemos rolls away the stone blocking the way out of his cave and feels the backs of his herd, he does not discover the men underneath. In *Jedi*, Luke throws a skull at the control panel of the gate between the holding chamber and the pit proper. The gate crashes down and crushes the Rancor.

17. In *Beowulf*, Grendel is immensely powerful, Grendel's dam is impervious to blows from most weapons, and both are ugly cannibals. In *Jedi*, the Rancor is powerful, seemingly invincible, ugly, and cannibalistic. Beowulf defeats Grendel by brute strength (he rips one of Grendel's arms off; Grendel escapes but soon bleeds to death) and Grendel's dam by luck (after his sword breaks, he finds a sword able to penetrate her armor-like hide).

18. *Orlando* 11.26-33. Unlike the Rancor, who snaps the bone, the orc cannot dislodge the anchor. Orlando enters the orc's gullet, wounds it, then swims to shore with the anchor cable and "lands" the dying monster.

19. Jabba's court is aboard a Sail Barge (pirate ship), travelling over a desert "sea." Luke is supposed to walk a plank. R2-D2 is hiding Luke's lightsaber (his cutlass). Finally, doing his best to imitate Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks, Jr, Luke grabs a rope, gathers up Leia, and swings with her from the Sail Barge to one of the skiffs, right before the Sail Barge explodes.

20. For instance, in *Orlando* 41.25, Ruggiero's horse, sword, and armor appear miraculously when Orlando, Brandimart, and Olivero (three Christians) are about to fight Agramante, Gradasso, and Sobrino (three pagans).

21. In early production design sketches, the shuttle resembled some sort of insect, perhaps a moth (*The Art...*, p. 64) or a beetle (*ibid.*, pp. 65-66). But the design evolved (possibly through a stage where it looked like a mechanical Tauntaun—*ibid.*, p. 7) until the final version of the shuttle looks a lot like a horse with wings.

22. For a succinct discussion of what Tasso means by *maraviglia*, see Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: 1965), pp. 186-92.

23. Although Leia sees Han right after Luke leaves, she is too upset to tell Han then that she is Luke's sister. Han finds out about Luke and Leia only at the very end of *Jedi*, just before the funeral pyre and celebration scenes.

24. See Tasso's *Allegorie del poema*.

25. See Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh," printed in most editions of *The Faerie Queene*.

26. One similarity is that the rebel combatants in both the private (Luke) and public (the strike team, the fleet) struggles experience the same "curve": initial confidence, utter despair, eventual success.

27. Single combat between two opposing heroes is a staple of European epic: Hector and Achilles in the *Iliad*, Turnus and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, Grendel and Beowulf in *Beowulf*, Satan and Abdiel in *Paradise Lost*. The motif also appears ubiquitously in the romantic epics of Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser.

28. At the end of *Empire*, Luke receives a bionic hand to replace the hand Darth Vader struck off during their duel in the carbon-freezing chamber of the Cloud City of Bespin. We are reminded twice during *Jedi* that Luke has a mechanical hand—once when it is hit by a laser blast during the rescue of Han and again soon after when Luke, on his way to Dagobah, pulls a black glove over the exposed mechanism. The underlying meaning of Luke's having a bionic hand is that, in time, he too could become another Darth Vader, "kept alive only by machinery and his own black will" (Kahn 3:64).

29. I have deliberately echoed Milton here: "Him [Satan] the Almighty Power/Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Sky/With hideous ruin and combustion down/To bottomless perdition, there to dwell/In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,/Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to Arms" (*Paradise Lost*, ed. Hughes, 1.44-49). In *Jedi* the Emperor is Satanic: he misuses the Force, he tempts Luke, and he is hurled out of "heaven" when he least expects it.

30. The difference between *New Hope* and *Empire* mirrors precisely the distinction between optimistic fairy tales and pessimistic myths in Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (NY, 1977), pp. 37-38.

31. In saying that *New Hope* is folkloric, *Empire* mythic, and *Jedi* epic, I am not ruling out, say, folkloric elements in *Empire*, epic elements in *New Hope*, or mythic elements in *Jedi*. Nevertheless, I think I am right to describe the overall effect of these movies as I have.

32. The exception is *THX-1138* (1971), Lucas's first feature-length and still his most openly sexual and political film.

33. There is, of course, one main danger inherent in the aesthetic: the borrowed fragments can remain fragments. To Lucas's credit, this has happened in only one film he has worked on—*More American Graffiti* (1979), a movie whose title has at least three meanings: *More American Graffiti* is a sequel to *American Graffiti*; it adds to that film's graffiti about America; and, with its chronologically disjunctive plot lines (the action occurs on four New Year's Eves—1965-68) and its highly experimental split-screen editing (up to 18 images appear at once), it is structurally more like graffiti than its predecessor. *More American Graffiti* shows what happens when disparate material escapes Lucas's shaping consciousness: the film was a box office disaster, barely recouping its \$6,000,000 production costs. Luckily, Lucas has shaped all the phenomenally successful *Star Wars* movies.

34. In "*Star Wars*: The Pastiche of Myth and the Yearning for a Past Future," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1977):1-10, Robert G. Collins explores how *New Hope* "combines the stereotypes of modern pop literature and cinema with the Arthurian romance" (p. 1). Collins and I agree completely that in *New Hope* Lucas is, in my terms, a graffiti artist. Indeed, much of what Collins says about *New Hope* and the revitalization of Arthurian romance can be transferred to *Jedi* and epic poetry. Andrew Gordon, in "*Star Wars*: A Myth for Our Time," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 6 (1978):314-26, shows that *New Hope* is "a compendium of American pop and pulp culture" and that "Lucas's achievement is to construct a coherent myth out of his pastiche of pop culture" (p. 319).

35. I cannot resist a final note about where the saga might be heading. Any answer, of course, must be speculative—and assumes that Lucas will actually make another *Star Wars* movie. If he does, I think he will not merely reprise what

he has already done. Though I doubt that he is aware of it, *New Hope*, *Empire*, and *Jedi* recapitulate the phylogenesis of Western literary forms, from folklore and mythology to epic. If this pattern continues, Lucas will have to go beyond the epic and move toward the novel. And if that happens, I think he will tap popular rather than literary novels: Lucas is not Woody Allen, who immersed himself in Russian novels before doing *Love and Death* (1975). Lucas himself has not said much about where the cycle is going, but what he has said is suggestive. He plans to do the first trilogy next—and the first trilogy will deal with intrigues leading to the fall of the Republic. So I would not be surprised were the next *Star Wars* movie to draw heavily on SF about galactic conspiracies. And if his movies to date are any indication, Lucas will cobble his intrigue from various SF sources.

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RÉSUMÉ

Todd H. Sammons. **Le Retour du Jedi: des graffiti épiques.**—Dans les trois films de *La Guerre des étoiles* de George Lucas, le héros de la trilogie, Luke Skywalker, passe de la jeunesse à l'adolescence et ensuite à l'âge adulte. De la même façon, les films évoluent et vont du folklore (*La Guerre des étoiles*: un nouvel espoir) au mythe (*L'Empire contre-attaque*) jusqu'à l'épopée (*Le Retour du Jedi*). Afin de donner un caractère épique au Jedi, Lucas emploie des métaphores qui ont leurs correspondances chez huit auteurs d'épopées: Homère, Virgile, le poète du Beowulf, Dante, l'Arioste, le Tasse, Spenser et Milton. En effet, pour chacune des scènes des principales sections de ces films—le sauvetage de Han Solo prisonnier de Jabba le Hutt, la mort de Yoda sur Dagobah et la bataille finale entre l'Empire et les Rebelles—il est possible de retrouver une correspondance épique. Mais peut-on dire que Lucas est "un érudit de l'épopée"; que les spectateurs saisisent ces

correspondances; et que le Jedi est une épopée bien que la saga ne soit pas terminée? Ne courons-nous pas le danger de surestimer le Jedi en le comparant à des chefs-d'œuvre littéraire, et le Jedi, est-il vraiment une épopée? Essentiellement, Lucas est assez familier avec le genre pour l'utiliser selon ses besoins; il n'est pas nécessaire aux spectateurs de connaître l'origine de ces correspondances pour réagir; les trois films de La guerre des étoiles sont différents les uns des autres. Je souligne des motifs assez évidents et j'évite une appréciation non-critique, enfin le Jedi n'est pas une vraie épopée. Cependant, le Jedi est un film typique de Lucas, confectionné selon son esthétique préférée, c'est-à-dire un pastiche de métaphores épiques prises dans de nombreuses épopées et unifiées par sa vision artistique. En d'autres termes, le Jedi correspond à des graffiti épiques. (THS)

Abstract.—*In the three Star Wars movies George Lucas has made so far, the trilogy's hero, Luke Skywalker, passes from youth through adolescence to adulthood. Similarly, the movies themselves mature, moving from folklore (Star Wars: A New Hope) through myth (The Empire Strikes Back) to epic (Return of the Jedi). In order to give Jedi an epic "feel," Lucas uses images that have analogues in no less than eight different epic authors: Homer, Virgil, the Beowulf poet, Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, and Milton. There are, in fact, epic analogues for every scene in each of the movie's major sections: the rescue of Han Solo from Jabba the Hutt, the death of Yoda on Dagobah, and the final battle between the Empire and the Rebels. But is Lucas "epic-literate," would the audience catch the analogues, should we talk about Jedi as epic before the saga is done, aren't we in danger of overvaluing Jedi by comparing it to literary masterpieces, and is Jedi really an epic? Basically, Lucas knows enough about epics to get what he needs; the audience does not have to know where an analogue comes from in order to respond to it; the three Star Wars movies made so far differ from one another; I am pointing out fairly obvious motifs and steering clear of uncritical evaluation; and Jedi is not a true epic. Jedi is, however, a typical Lucas movie, made according to his preferred aesthetic: it is a pastiche of epic images, found in many different epics and unified only by his own artistic vision. Jedi, in other words, amounts to epic graffiti. (THS)*

Andrew Gordon

Back to the Future: Oedipus as Time Traveller

Back to the Future is a significant phenomenon of recent American popular culture. The movie, written by Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale, directed by Zemeckis, and produced by Steven Spielberg, Frank Marshall, and Kathleen Kennedy, was the biggest Hollywood moneymaker of 1985, surpassing even *Rambo*. Its first run at many theatres was an unprecedented six or seven months straight.

What is the secret of its appeal? On the surface it has all the necessary ingredients—comedy, action, suspense, romance, sentiment, fantasy, special effects, and catchy music—integral to other recent blockbuster SF films such as *Star Wars* and *E.T.* But these elements alone, or in the wrong mixture, are not enough to guarantee success with a large audience. In addition, *Back to the Future* has a clever plot and the appeal of 1950s' nostalgia. The teen hero attracts the young, and the theme of reconciliation between past and present, child and adults, attracts their parents as well. Even the critics loved it, taken in by its charm, sentiment, and an ingenious script which was nominated for an Academy Award—another unprecedented achievement for an SF film.¹

Like *Star Wars*, *Back to the Future*'s success depends to a great degree upon its ritualistic, celebratory, therapeutic aspects: it is a "clean" family film which attracts all ages, and encourages audience participation (spontaneous clapping and cheering) and repeat viewing (many fans return, bringing friends or family).²

It is this level of the film that most interests me: the paradox of a family comedy which flirts with incest. I would argue that the film succeeds because it deftly combines two current and oddly connected American pre-occupations—with time travel and with incest—and defuses our anxieties about both through comedy.

Since 1979, there has been a proliferation of time-travel films, including *Time After Time* (1979), *Somewhere in Time* (1980), *The Final Countdown* (1980), *Time Bandits* (1981), *Timerider* (1983), *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983), *The Philadelphia Experiment* (1984), *The Terminator* (1984), *Trancers* (1985; an imitation of *The Terminator*), *Back to the Future* (1985), *My Science Project* (1985), the made-for-television movies *The Blue Yonder* (1986) and *Outlaws* (1986), and, most recently, *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), *Flight of the Navigator* (1986), and *Star Trek IV* (1987). According to Wyn Wachhorst, "time travel has only recently become a frequent cinematic theme, having increased by more than fifty percent relative to the rise in total science-fiction films during the past decade" (p. 340).

I believe that this recent explosion of time-travel films represents a pervasive uneasiness about our present and uncertainty about our future, along with a concurrent nostalgia about our past. These time-travel films rarely attempt a vision of the future, and when they do, as in *The Terminator*, the future is bleak and post-apocalyptic. And during the same period (1979-87), in other SF films without a time-travel premise, the future is almost always a negative extrapolation from the present: overcrowded, decayed, bureaucratic and soulless, repressive, and either on the verge of destruction or post-apocalyptic. H. Bruce Franklin has summarized the negative Hollywood vision of the future from 1970-82 ("Don't Look Where We're Going"); the picture hasn't changed much in the past five years, and the *Star Trek* movies remain about the only optimistic cinematic vision of the future, which may account in large measure for their enormous popularity. It also helps to account for the success of *Back to the Future*, which attempts to reassure us that, in the words of the movie, "the future is in your hands."

The majority of recent time-travel films do not, in fact, concern the future at all (*Back to the Future* does not, despite its title) but deal instead with an escape into an idealized past in a desperate attempt to alter the present and the future. They reflect a growing dissatisfaction with a present that is sensed as dehumanized, diseased, out of control, and perhaps doomed. Somewhere along the line, the unspoken feeling goes, something went drastically wrong; if we could only return to the appropriate crossroads in the past and correct things, we could mend history and return to a revised, glorious present or future, the time line we truly deserve. *Back to the Future*, *The Blue Yonder* (about a boy who travels back from 1986 to 1927 to help his grandfather), and *Peggy Sue Got Married* deal with the attempts of individuals to revise their personal time lines by a return to the past; *The Terminator* and *Star Trek IV* concern groups from the future attempting a rescue in our present so that humanity may *have* a future. A similar premise holds in Gregory Benford's novel *Timescape* (1980), where the ecologically poisoned, dying world of 1998 sends a warning back to the prelapsarian world of 1963. The effect of the message is to avert the catastrophe by creating an alternate time line.

Such, then, is the contemporary preoccupation with time to which *Back to the Future* appeals. But along with our anxieties about the future, the film also comically mirrors new, more accepting popular attitudes about time travel, or rather, "time shifting," and a flattening out of our perspective of time. Thus Tom Shales notes that, from 1979-85, most time-travel movies failed at the box office. "The only one to hit it really big was *Back to the Future*, a phrase that almost sums the Eighties up, and that's partly because the movie made time travel a joke, a gag, a hoot. We are not amazed at the thought of time travel because we do it every day" (p. 67). Shales labels the Eighties "The Re Decade," a decade of replays, reruns, and recycling of popular culture, epitomized by videorecorders. "Television is our national time machine" (p. 68).

Back to the Future demonstrates the reciprocity of contemporary image-making, which cuts across all time lines. In the course of the movie, we see video images of the present (Dr Brown's 1985 experiment) rerun in

the past, as well as images of the past (*The Honeymooners*) rerun in the present. The self-reflexivity of *Future*'s use of video points to what Garrett Stewart calls "the 'videology' of science fiction": movies about the technology of the image allow us to observe the ideologies "by which we see and so lead our lives" (p. 207). But this self-reflexivity also illustrates Vivian Sobchack's claim: "*Back to the Future* is a generic symptom of our collapsed sense of time and history" (p. 274).

In fact, past and present are so collapsed in the plot of the movie that the young hero Marty's life threatens to become nothing more than a rerun, like the *Honeymooners* episode repeated during two separate family dinners. The audience gets the eerie comic effect of instant replay when we see gestures, lines, or entire scenes from 1985 echoed almost word for word in 1955. The present reruns the past, or vice-versa. These characters seem subject to a sort of repetition compulsion, doomed to neurotic closed loops until Marty intervenes to rewrite the script.

As SF comedy, *Back to the Future* is more successful than *Time Bandits* or *Peggy Sue Got Married* in playing the incongruities of time travel for laughs. *Time Bandits* is episodic in structure and only fitfully funny, and *Peggy Sue* shifts uncomfortably in tone between farce and melodrama. But *Back to the Future* is consistently funny because it is grounded in the broad humor of television sitcoms and classic Hollywood "screwball comedy."

Harlan Ellison despised *Back to the Future*, complaining that "the lofty time paradox possibilities are reduced to the imbecile level of sitcom" (p. 88). But it seems to me that the use of a sitcom framework was a deliberate strategy on the part of the filmmakers to tame the potentially touchy subject of incest. In the 1970s, sitcom, through such innovative series as *All in the Family* and *M.A.S.H.*, became a liberal forum for dealing with controversial social and political issues with a humorous touch. *Back to the Future* offers a popular audience familiarity and reassurance through its stock characters (the Nerd, the Bully, the Nutty Professor) and stock premise (time travel, the subject of so many movies and TV shows) and its star, Michael J. Fox, borrowed from a successful sitcom (*Family Ties*). And the small-town environment it presents is equally formulaic and reassuring to audiences. As Vivian Sobchack mentions, "the mise-en-scène of *Back to the Future* spatializes neither 1955 nor 1985, but the television time of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*" (p. 274). The filmmakers are aware of the film's roots in television: thus producer Steven Spielberg called *Back to the Future* "the greatest *Leave it to Beaver* episode ever produced" and writer-director Robert Zemeckis described it as "a cross between Frank Capra and *The Twilight Zone*" (Stein: 41). And I have already noted the homage to Jackie Gleason's *The Honeymooners*.

But the film's comedy is not pure sitcom. Zemeckis, who has directed comedy before (*I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, *Used Cars*, *Romancing the Stone*), attributes his success partially to his reverence for "comedy classics" and traditional methods of making comic films (Stein: 37). Jack Kroll called *Future* "a true American comedy, with the sweet wit and benevolent bite of Preston Sturges and Frank Capra" (p. 76). Indeed, with its small-town hero, humor, and time-travel premise, it bears some comparison with

Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. And Pauline Kael wrote that *Future* "has the structure of a comedy classic" (p. 58). I also noticed that the image of Dr Brown dangling perilously from the hands of a clock evokes Harold Lloyd. In other words, the film draws on the traditions of both sitcom and classic Hollywood comedy. It has a sure comic sense, employing a whole range of comic devices, including physical humor such as farce and slapstick, situational humor, irony, comedy of character, and verbal wit. The movie exhilarates audiences because it glories in its own outrageousness and plays almost everything for laughs.

So *Back to the Future* makes us laugh at the incongruous possibilities of time travel. But it also makes us laugh at incest, or at least flirts with the possibility of a sexual relationship between mother and son. What is funny about that, especially for a family audience?

It has been 30 years since Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* made the violation of the incest taboo a possible subject for American popular culture. Since that time, sociologists and psychologists have been collecting data on incest, and newspaper stories have focussed attention on the frequent violations of the taboo and the connections between incest, prostitution, child abuse, and child molestation. Our uneasiness on the subject has not necessarily decreased as our knowledge has increased (cf. Twitchell). In fact, it might be argued that the publicity has perhaps enhanced social anxiety: people may fear that incest is all around them, like AIDS, and that they may be the next to catch it. In any event, in 1985 there was a television movie (*Something About Amelia*) and two feature films on the subject of incest: *The Color Purple* and *Back to the Future*. The most popular of these films, *Back to the Future* makes the (attempted) incest laughable, just as *Lolita* made the subject more palatable by dealing with it through black humor.

But although *Back to the Future* temporarily frees us from some of our anxiety by making incest laughable, it no more renders incest acceptable or guiltfree than Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* condones adultery. Instead, *Future* distances us from the incest by making both the mother's brazenness and the son's terror laughable. And it teases our fear and desire by a last-minute avoidance of the physical act. The desire, guilt, and fear are still attached to the incest taboo, but the audience is comfortable with those feelings because we get a momentary comic bonus from them.

On one level, the film is therapeutic comedy, filled with psychosexual anxiety that is aroused and then relieved. One critic (Hoberman) calls it "teenage Woody Allen," and writes that "Marty resolves his sexual crisis by working through his own family romance....Marty is nothing less than an American Oedipus who learns to conquer his desire for his mother (projected, in the film's key scene, back onto her) and accede to the rule of the father." And other critics assert that "it is on the timeless plane of myth that *Back to the Future* has its finest moments....In that timeless realm Marty can participate (or rather, almost participate) in that delightful parody of the Oedipus myth..." (Barksdale & Pace: 57).

I would argue that *Back to the Future* is the first SF film to make explicit the incestuous possibilities that have always been at the heart of our fascination with time travel. Time travel is an unnatural act which is fre-

quently used to allow the fulfillment of oedipal fantasies or family romance. By changing the relative ages of family members and turning the hero into a stranger to his own family, time travel permits the hero to freely romance his own mother or other ancestors or descendants.

Critics have noted that H.G. Wells's *Time Traveller* comes face to face with a Sphinx and walks with a limp, both of which connect him with Oedipus (cf. Scafella, Ketterer). And some 20th-century American SF writers have openly explored the incestuous possibilities of time travel. For example, the hero of Robert Silverberg's *Up the Line* wipes himself out by meddling with the past: he defies the time traveller's code by making love to a woman who is his remote ancestor. Robert A. Heinlein is the American writer most fascinated with the possibility of violating the incest taboo through time travel. In *The Door into Summer*, the protagonist, through time travel, is able to marry a little girl who is his ward. In *Time Enough for Love*, Lazarus Long falls in love with several adopted daughters, including "Llita" (suggesting "Lolita") and "Dora" (suggesting Freud's case study of a woman who loved her father too much), and finally goes back in time to physically consummate his love for his mother. In "All You Zombies," the hero commits the ultimate incest; through time travel and a sex-change operation he is able to seduce himself and give birth to himself.³

Wyn Wachhorst explains the recent rise in popularity of time-travel films in psychological terms as "an attempt to reenchant the world, to regain a sense of belongingness, to reinstate the magical, autocentric universe of the child and the primitive—while retaining the reality projected by rational, individualized consciousness" (p. 350). For Wachhorst, the "time-travel romance" is a disguised oedipal fantasy. He notes that in such recent movies as *Somewhere in Time*, *Timerider*, and *The Final Countdown*, the omnipotent male time traveller returns to the past (symbolically, Paradise or the world of childhood) where he romances an innocent woman who stands in for the mother (in *Timerider*, she is his grandmother). The variations on this pattern, such as *Time After Time* and *The Philadelphia Experiment*, where the hero goes from the past into the future to find romance with the innocent woman, Wachhorst considers less successful. One could add to his list of time travel romances involving sublimated incest the recent film *The Terminator* (1984), in which a man sends his father into the past to ensure that his father will impregnate his mother.

Back to the Future represents the desublimated form of the time-travel romance since the heroine and hero no longer stand in for mother and son but *are* mother and son. Marty McFly is the time traveller as a would-be teenage Oedipus. Like Oedipus, Marty attempts to flee his fate—not to another town but to another time. And like Oedipus, his flight leads him directly into the very predicament he dreaded (and Freud would claim, secretly desired): into his mother's bed. But this is comedy, not tragedy: whereas Oedipus kills his father at the crossroads, Marty rescues his; and whereas Oedipus marries his mother, Marty temporarily endures his mother's sexual attentions for the sake of reuniting his parents. Marty, in other words, is a reluctant Oedipus, an innocent and blameless, comic Oedipus who never consummates the act.

Back to the Future enacts a fantasy of innocent power: Marty is portrayed as innocent victim of circumstances, yet as time traveller he has omnipotent powers. His return to the past enables him to resolve an oedipal crisis and reshape his life and the lives of his parents for the better. He acts out the "family romance" to which Freud referred: the desire to replace unsatisfactory parents with idealized ones.

Marty as omnipotent time traveller goes from the degraded present of 1985—with its graffiti, x-rated movies, homeless drunks sleeping on benches in littered parks, terrorists stalking the streets—to the prelapsarian 1955; spotless, pristine, virginal. But it is a virginity panting to be deflowered. Our innocent hero now finds himself subject to the sexual terrorism of his own mother, who sees him as the man of her dreams.

Back to the Future, like *It's a Wonderful Life*, is a film about dreams, dreams turned into nightmare and changed back into happy endings. "It's all a dream," Marty tells himself when he arrives back in 1955, "Just a very intense dream." As he walks through the town square, the song that's playing is "Mr Sandman, Bring Me a Dream." When he first wakes up in his mother's bed, he still believes it is all a bad dream. But his mother, Lorraine, in 1955 considers Marty a "dreamboat" and "an absolute dream."

What exactly is the content of this dream? In "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," Freud talks about the kind of "time travelling" which normally occurs in fantasy, dreams, and daydreams:

The relation of phantasies to time is altogether of great importance. One may say that a phantasy at one and the same moment hovers between three periods of time—the three periods of our ideation. The activity of phantasy in the mind is linked up with some current impression, occasioned by some event in the present, which had the power to rouse an intense desire. From there it wanders back to the memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to infancy, in which this wish was fulfilled. Then it creates for itself a situation which is to emerge in the future, representing the fulfillment of the wish—this is the day-dream or phantasy, which now carries in it traces both of the occasion which engendered it and of some past memory. So past, present and future are threaded, as it were, on the string of the wish that runs through them all. (p. 38)

Marty's experiences in 1955 and his return to an altered 1985 can be considered an elaborate daydream whose relationship to time corresponds to the pattern described by Freud. His daydream is occasioned by his frustration and failure in 1985, by his personal and sexual insecurity. He retreats to the past, to 1955—but symbolically he is in the world of infancy, when the bond between himself and his mother was strongest. As Wachhorst says, the time-travel romance reinstates "the magical, autocentric universe of the child" (p. 350). In 1955, Marty is both a child overpowered by his mother and, paradoxically, an omnipotent adult who can become the parent to his own parents. After he has indulged and overcome his oedipal fears and desires, and restructured his parents' lives to create the idealized family he desires, he returns to a revised 1985 in which his problems have magically disappeared. In truth, his past, present, and future are threaded "on the string of the wish that runs through them all."

The structure of the film resembles that of the classic Hollywood fantasy, *The Wizard of Oz*: a "realistic" opening sequence establishes a problem for the young protagonist which a "fantastic" second sequence resolves. Characters and scenes from the first sequence recur in the second one, echoed but strangely reshaped by the wish-fulfilling distortions of the dream. *The Wizard* adheres to the conventions of fantasy: the transformation is apparently effected by means of a twister; only at the end is it revealed that the Oz sequence was a feverish dream induced by a blow on the head. *Future* instead uses the conventions of SF: the transformation is effected by machinery (the DeLorean car/time machine), and the second sequence is presented as real. But it may be significant that the first thing Marty encounters in 1955 is a scarecrow, reminding us of Dorothy in Oz!

Moreover, both Dorothy and Marty are presented as innocents, strangers in a strange land stranded there by accident, not by their own desires, and wishing only to go home. Marty depends upon the bumbling scientist, Dr Brown, to send him back to his own time, just as Dorothy relied upon the inept Wizard to return her to Kansas. Both films are fantasies of innocent power, in which the protagonist combines the helplessness of a child with the superpowers that the child perceives the adult as having: Dorothy's magical helpers and ruby slippers, or Marty's time machine and other advanced technology from 1985 (skateboard, videocamera, and Sony Walkman). Dorothy is acclaimed a powerful witch by the Munchkins, and Marty in 1955 is at first mistaken for an invader from another planet by the paranoid citizens, who have seen too many 1950s' SF films and read too many comic books. Later, he takes advantage of their gullibility and happily assumes the role of an extraterrestrial with superpowers: "Darth Vader from the planet Vulcan."⁴

The opening sequence of *Future*, like the opening of *The Wizard*, is a catalogue of frustration and failure for the protagonist, failures which will all be rectified in the following "dream" sequence. We are introduced to Marty McFly, a 17-year-old living in the California town of Hill Valley in 1985. The chronically tardy Marty first loses his race against time and is late for school the fourth day in a row. There he is put down by a hostile teacher, Mr Strickland, who accuses him of being a failure like his father George McFly. Then, as Mr Strickland predicts, Marty loses the school rock band competition. Next, he is frustrated in his attempts to neck with his girlfriend, Jennifer, and arrives home to find the family car wrecked by his father's supervisor, Biff, ruining Marty's hopes for a hot date on the weekend with Jennifer. He sees his father humiliated by Biff and sits down to dinner with a family of nerds and losers, among whom he seems hopelessly out of place. "No McFly ever amounted to anything in the history of Hill Valley," the nasty Mr Strickland told him, to which McFly cockily replied, "History is gonna change." The second sequence, Hill Valley in 1955, functions as a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which history can be changed, this entire day of defeat cancelled and all of Marty's dreams realized.

Marty lacks confidence because he has a weakling for a father and an overpowering mother; thus, he has not yet successfully overcome the

œdipal phase. He wishes for a strong father to dominate his threatening mother and help him earn his manhood. Marty's mother in the opening sequence is dissatisfied with her husband and her life: she smokes, eats, and drinks to excess. Her sexual dissatisfaction has made her both repressed and repressing: she denies having any sexuality when she was a girl and disapproves of Jennifer for pursuing Marty. For Marty, this means that she is trying to prevent his sexual development and keep him bound to her.

The father image is split into three stock characters: George the wimp, Biff the bully, and Dr Brown the nutty professor and kindly "uncle." If George is impotent, then Biff is overly potent (and a rapist), and the celibate Brown is comfortingly asexual (but omnipotent). Biff humiliates the spineless father in front of Marty: in a sense he is as much a representation of Marty's hostility toward his father as he is a symbol of the avenging, sexual, castrating side of the father. Biff bosses the household like the "real man" to whom George's wife and everything else George possesses (job, family, house, refrigerator, and car) belongs. "Say hi to your mom," Biff leeringly tells Marty. Biff's unhealthy intrusion into and destruction of the household, his overturning of the authority of the father, and his symbolic possession of the mother—all these, plus the exaggeration in his depiction, turn him into a symbol of the child's œdipal rebellion against the father. Biff is the unhealthy side of Marty; thus Biff's power must be tamed and restored to its rightful owner, the father, for the film to conclude successfully. Of course, Biff is a stock character, like the rest of the characters: that makes it that much easier for the audience to engage in the same kind of splitting of desires that the film is indulging as a defense. By providing a bully we can hoot at, the film also enables us to cheer for the hero without ambivalence.

As for Dr Brown the Wizard, he gives Marty the call to adventure and provides him with superscience, the magical tools and the wisdom and confidence he needs to undergo his initiation into manhood. As Zemeckis explains, "The story is anchored in a sort of benevolent Merlin/Arthur kind of relationship between Dr. Brown and Marty" (Stein: 42). Their relationship also echoes that of Ben Kenobi and Luke in *Star Wars*. Just as Ben Kenobi provides Luke with a lightsaber and the power of "The Force," so Brown provides Marty with a time machine. And Luke witnesses Ben's death and resurrection (as part of the Force), whereas Marty sees Brown murdered and then return to life; both sequences could be said to do and undo patricidal wishes. Brown also expresses the desires in the film for omnipotence, perhaps as a way to overcome fears of failure, castration, or impotence. The audience roots for both Brown and Marty, for both triumph after a long string of failures and return from near death or apparent death. Finally, since a kid has the power for much of the film, and we are distanced from the parents and other adults, who are made to seem either physically or sexually intimidating, pathetic, or foolish, Dr Brown serves as a substitute, idealized parent who is wise but funny, and completely asexual.

The father image may be split into three, but the mother image is split into two, which are, roughly, mother-nun and virgin-whore. The repressive mother of the opening sequence in 1985 is transformed into the horny teenag-

er Lorraine in 1955. When Marty rescues his father from an automobile accident, Marty is injured and takes his father's place in his mother's affections. Now he must undo all this, under threat of never being born. What we see here is a simple role reversal or projection of desires: horny Marty and the repressive mother simply switch places, and the mother's lustful pursuit of him expresses both oedipal fears and desires. Throughout, Marty is portrayed as purely innocent, acting only from the noblest of motives and merely the victim of circumstances. This, plus the mother's exaggerated lust and Marty's exaggerated sexual terror, enable us to enjoy it as comedy.

The best that Marty can do is to stage a rescue fantasy in which the father is to save the mother from the pawing of the son, thereby putting Oedipus to rest. Through an ironic (and appropriate) twist of fate, George ends up rescuing Lorraine instead from the molestations of Biff: that is, from innocent Marty's evil stand-in, a sexual beast.

The resolution the film offers is to transform George into a strong father by effectively castrating Biff and transferring his potency to George. Biff's loss of power also represents Marty's abandoning of the desire for the mother. But the desire for omnipotence (perhaps as a defense against the fear of castration) remain at the end: Marty has passed his initiation ritual but he is once again lured into adventure by Dr Brown. Having rewritten the past and the present, they will now presumably go on to reshape the future. In the exhilarating conclusion, Marty and Jennifer depart with the Professor in the DeLorean (now run by fusion and able to fly), off to the future to rescue their children. The audience leaves the movie on this exhilarating note, feeling a sense of infinite possibilities, feeling that, as a line from the movie goes, "The future is in your hands."

The struggle in the film, then, for Marty and Dr Brown and George, is to gain power and control over that power, to counter impotence and failure with omnipotence and success. To put it another way, there is a phallic struggle contained within the oedipal one. In the film's opening scene, Marty enters the lab, switches on a machine and turns it all the way up to "Overdrive." He plugs in an electric guitar and stands in front of a monstrously huge amplifier. The first chord he strums destroys the amp and blows him across the room. But Marty makes a soft landing in a chair and is unharmed, despite a bookcase tipping over and dumping its contents on him. The scene prefigures the later scenes when the DeLorean is revved up to Overdrive and blows Marty across time to a safe landing. The film shows the exhilaration of playing around with omnipotence. Marty is the sorcerer's apprentice whose dream comes true, who overcomes all the dangers inherent in possessing fantastic power.

Aside from the electric guitar, the time machine itself is the primary symbol of "phallic" power. It is powerful and intrusive, building up energy and then releasing it in an orgasmic burst. Marty is constantly crashing the car into things. It is difficult for him to control and prone to embarrassing failures to start. The clock tower can be taken as another phallic symbol, particularly in the climactic scene, when it is struck by lightning. And the bazooka with which the Libyan terrorists threaten Marty is made to seem particularly phallic by the camera angle.

The movie also makes comedy out of the exaggerated contrasts between little Marty and the big guys who intimidate him, such as Lou (the owner of the diner) and Biff. These contrasts in size could also be interpreted as phallic. In scene after scene, the camera exaggerates Biff's size as he looms ominously over Marty. Repeatedly, the power balance is restored by cutting Biff down to size, tripping him or hitting him so that he falls down. Biff gets his final comeuppance after he has knocked Lorraine to the ground and forced George to his knees by twisting his arm. At this point, George's fist seems to act independently of him, and he fells Biff with one mighty blow. Afterwards, George pants ecstatically and admires his hand with astonishment and delight before he helps Lorraine to her feet. Because this crucial scene is staged so melodramatically, the sexual symbolism becomes blatant.

Including this scene, I counted 14 instances in which characters tripped, fell, fainted, were knocked down, knocked out, or gunned down. The climactic scenes for all five major characters—Marty, Dr Brown, George, Lorraine, and Biff—involve their being forced down. We see all of them get up again, though, except for the villain Biff, who goes down and stays down. When Marty is with his mother in 1955, he is constantly backing away from her or falling over out of sexual terror. There are also six car crashes in the film. These many pratfalls and crashes provide both comedy and action, but they might also suggest an underlying concern with potency, with staying up and crashing through barriers.

Aside from its indulgence in oedipal and phallic fantasies, the film also involves a great deal of voyeurism and exhibitionism. At times, it even seems as if the main pleasure and the main sin is not in incest but in looking, watching, spying, and being looked at. Young Lorraine gazes with longing at Marty, Dr Brown keeps rerunning the image of himself on videotape, Marty turns his head to gaze at the girls walking by in leotards (and his girlfriend Jennifer forcibly returns his gaze to her), Marty exhibits himself onstage in his guitar performances, Lorraine undresses with the blinds up as George, a "peeping Tom," spies on her through binoculars, and Biff tells Marty repeatedly to stop staring at him ("What are you looking at, butthead?") and tells his buddies to stop staring as he is about to rape Lorraine: "This ain't no peep show." In one of the film's most memorable scenes, we see two Martys: One watches helplessly as Dr Brown is assassinated while the other, just returned from time travelling, helplessly watches himself watching helplessly.

So *Future* is indeed a fascinating "peep show." Of course, as critics have mentioned, voyeurism and exhibitionism may be an intrinsic feature of making and viewing films, and in most Hollywood films the primary object of the gaze is a woman.⁵ This movie is no exception. But the particular emphasis in *Back to the Future* on voyeurism, aside from providing some incidental pleasure for viewers, may be a way of displacing our interest from the overt incest of the plot to the sublimated incest of spying on the parents.⁶ In fact, *Back to the Future* might even be considered one extended "primal scene."

The most remarkable primal scene imagery in the film occurs when Marty plays his guitar at the high school dance in 1955. He has just wit-

nessed his parents' first kiss, itself a symbolic primal scene. Marty, who had feared being wiped out of existence if they didn't kiss, has just been reborn, so he plays Chuck Berry's joyous rock anthem "Johnny B. Goode" to celebrate his new lease on life. By a twist of history, his rebirth coincides with the birth of rock and roll. In one of the film's funniest scenes, Marty shows off before this hick 1955 crowd, exhibiting 1985 savvy, as he had done before with his skateboarding. But he overdoes it and embarrasses himself. Marty quickly recapitulates the history of rock and roll and winds up on the floor of the stage, producing heavy metal squeals as he practically copulates with his guitar. Like many rock and roll performances, it is a phallic celebration, with overtones of public masturbation. When Marty opens his eyes, he sees the 1955 audience staring in shocked silence. Shamefacedly, he apologizes: "I guess you guys aren't ready for that yet. But your kids are gonna love it!"

In the context of this film, "it" could stand for either rock and roll or sex (which have always been closely connected in the popular imagination, anyway, as in "drugs, sex, and rock and roll"). Earlier, Marty's sexuality was repressed by his mother, and his music was repressed by the school. He lost the band contest because his brand of rock was deemed "too darn loud" (read "too sexual"). So when Marty undoes this failure by playing at the high school dance, he expresses a new confidence both in his music and in his sexuality. After all, he has just rejoiced in witnessing his parents' first kiss, which means that he has accepted their sexuality and so is better able to accept his own.

Thus it is possible to read his guitar playing not simply as masturbatory exhibitionism, which it is, but also as a recapitulation of the primal scene: Marty stands in for both father and mother in the act of conceiving him, and the silent, staring crowd, shocked and puzzled by this violent activity and the strange sounds accompanying it, stands in for the child witness.⁷ The scene is pleasurable for an audience in part because it makes primal scene imagery not terrifying but *funny*: the performance is a comic triumph for Marty, who easily shrugs off his embarrassment, showing a new mood of confidence and self-acceptance.

Back to the Future, as I have attempted to demonstrate, appeals on many different psychosexual levels to viewers: it makes comedy out of voyeurism, phallic exhibitionism, incest, and the primal scene. But I should also mention one last level of its humor, which is excremental comedy, a delight in *mess*: the overflowing bowl of dog food, the overturned bookshelf, and the truckload of manure tipped over on Biff. In the final scene, Dr Brown maniacally rummages through the garbage cans for fuel to power his "Mr Fusion" generator. It may also be significant that, in such a "clean" comedy, the only vulgarities uttered are "butthead," "serious shit," and "assholes."

Moreover, it is a psychoanalytic commonplace that problems relating to the "anal" phase of development revolve around autonomy and control, cleanliness and order, and time. Not surprisingly, the film concerns all these issues: a struggle for autonomy and control, a revolt against cleanliness and order, and an obsession with time. These conflicts are unconsciously con-

nected, so that the central battle to overcome time also represents Marty's and Brown's struggles for autonomy and control. The opening shot is a long pan of the ticking clocks in Dr Brown's laboratory, including one with a man dangling from the hands of the clock, just as Dr Brown will do later. Marty is chronically tardy and, like the Professor, always racing against time. In other words, although an oedipal fantasy is at the heart of the movie, it is connected with and strongly colored by concerns from the stage that Erik H. Erikson called "autonomy vs. shame and doubt" (pp. 251-54).

It is easy enough to dissolve a film into relatively primitive psychosexual levels. But a fantasy of omnipotence will not work for an audience unless it has speed, energy, and style. And *Back to the Future* has these in abundance: its infectious high spirits and restless camera movements catch the viewer up in the action from beginning to end.

The recent proliferation of time-travel films speaks to our nostalgia for the past, our dissatisfaction with the present, and our dread of the future. *Back to the Future* is a therapeutic comedy because it suggests that time and human character are malleable, which is what Americans have always wanted to believe. Granted, it is possible to fault the film for its "blandly positivist" notions of mental health (Hoberman), its antiseptic vision of the 1950s (Hoberman; Kael, p. 58), and its final conversion of Marty's family into yuppies (Kael: 58). Nevertheless, these are not fundamental flaws and they do not detract from the film's power to make us laugh and to reassure us.

The therapeutic nature of *Back to the Future* consists in rendering explicit the incestuous possibilities that have always been at the core of our fascination with time travel and exploiting those possibilities for the purposes of a comic resolution to an oedipal crisis. *Future* allows us to laugh at potentially dangerous material by placing it within the context of classic film comedy and situation comedy and by deliberately using stock character types. Moreover, it distances the oedipal crisis through the fantastic, displaces it from the present to the past and from the child to the parent. Through a fantasy of innocent power, it permits us to identify with an innocent hero, to retreat to the purity of childhood while retaining the power and control of adulthood. The sophistication of the 1980s meets the naïveté of the 1950s, and the film validates both. *Back to the Future* is an ingenious wish-fulfillment fantasy with an upbeat message, a therapeutic family comedy, allowing a rare, momentary reconciliation between past and present and between parent and child.

NOTES

1. For some representative, largely positive, responses to *Back to the Future*, see the reviews by Hoberman, Kael, Kauffman, and Kroll.

2. I conducted an informal survey of audience response to *Back to the Future*. I asked two undergraduate classes at the University of Florida to write their responses and I taped interviews with some audience members immediately after they viewed the film in a theater. Some of the results were unexpected. First, entirely without prompting, many praised the film as scrupulously clean: "the viewer does not feel dirty"; "good, clean humor...no sex, gore or profanity"; "not at all offensive";

and "one of the cleanest films, without any type of filth in it." Either these comments are defensive denials, or else this is a sad commentary on the current state of Hollywood films, because *Back to the Future* deals with a peeping tom, attempted rape and attempted incest, and includes three (admittedly mild) vulgarities: "butthead," "shit," and "assholes." Second, based on my limited sampling, this film is apparently very popular with 13-year-old boys, some of whom went first with friends and then returned with their families, including their mothers. You can make of this what you will, but to me it indicates that the film is a therapeutic family comedy.

3. I am indebted to H. Bruce Franklin's discussion of the incest theme in Heinlein in *Robert A. Heinlein*, pp. 120-24, 184-86, 191-97.

4. *Back to the Future*, like most SF films since 1977, is openly intertextual, and our pleasure in the film to a degree depends upon our shared knowledge of twentieth-century American popular culture and the shock of recognition of seeing familiar material reworked in a new context. As Sobchack mentions, "It is only recently that the SF film has so reflexively embraced its own former status as 'schlock' and 'kitsch' and/or embraced the 'whole "degraded" landscape of schlock and kitsch' that represents contemporary American popular culture" (p. 249).

5. On two kinds of voyeurism in film, see Metz, pp. 89-98. On woman as image in film, see Mulvey.

6. Based on my survey, many viewers were fascinated by the idea of spying on the parents: "when the boy finds himself in the past, he seeks the home of his parents" (this response is not strictly true to the plot); "everyone would probably love to go back...and see what it was like when their parents were young"; "made me wonder about my parents at that age"; "I really enjoyed seeing the main character with his parents as teenagers."

7. For a thorough investigation of primal scene imagery in films, including science-fiction films, see Dervin.

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RÉSUMÉ

Andrew Gordon. **Retour vers le futur: Oedipe, voyageur du temps.**—La plus grande réussite de Hollywood en 1985 a été *Retour vers le futur*. Ce dernier doit son succès en grande partie, tout comme *La guerre des étoiles*, à ses caractéristiques rituelle, commémorative et curative. C'est un film familial "propre" qui encourage la participation des spectateurs et que l'on retourne voir plusieurs fois. Cependant d'une façon paradoxale, ce film "propre" flirte avec l'inceste. Sa structure ressemble à celle des films fantaisistes hollywoodiens tels que *It's a Wonderful Life* et *Le magicien d'Oz*; il s'appuie également sur les schèmes habituels que l'on retrouve dans les comédies de situation télédiffusées. Par le biais du comique, le film réussit à conjuguer et à désamorcer les angoisses contemporaines des Américains concernant le voyage dans le temps et l'inceste. C'est le premier film de science-fiction qui illustre catégoriquement les éventualités de nature incestueuse qui se sont toujours trouvées au coeur de notre fascination avec le voyage dans le temps. *Retour vers le futur* offre une solution comique à la crise oedipienne et renforce la conviction des Américains que l'histoire peut changer et que le temps ainsi que la personnalité des êtres humains sont maniables. (AG)

Abstract.—*Back to the Future*, the biggest Hollywood hit of 1985, owes its success to a great degree, like that of *Star Wars*, to its ritualistic, celebratory, therapeutic aspects. It is a "clean" family film which encourages audience participation and repeat viewing. Yet, paradoxically, this "clean" film flirts with incest. It is structured much like classic Hollywood fantasies such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *The Wizard of Oz*, and also relies on the conventions of television situation comedy. Through comedy, the film successfully combines and defuses contemporary American anxieties about time travel and incest. It is the first SF film to make explicit the incestuous possibilities that have always been at the heart of our fascination with time travel. *Back to the Future* both provides a comic resolution to an oedipal crisis and reinforces the traditional American belief that history can change, that time and human character are malleable. (AG)

Andrew Gordon

**Science-Fiction Film Criticism:
The Postmodern Always Rings Twice**

Vivian Sobchack. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 2nd ed., enlarged. NY: Ungar, 1987. 345pp. \$14.95.

Imagine that we are all living inside Pee-wee's Playhouse: children at play in a consumer world of toys and clutter, on a perpetual giggling high, surrounded by friendly robots and friendly monsters. We play with talking furniture and puppets and are interrupted by cartoons; we are ourselves not so different from the furniture, puppets, and cartoon characters. We inhabit a magical space; we can jump into an electronic screen and become part of the image, then jump back again. We have no connected story to tell, just a barrage of images and events. In such an environment, dichotomies like real/fantasy, human/machine, or human/alien become meaningless, and our sense of space and time is so stretched that it threatens to dissolve.

In the age of MTV, Max Headroom, and Pee-wee Herman, mass culture has gone postmodern with a vengeance. It is often difficult to tell the difference between SF and other movie and television genres. In fact, as the critic Brooks Landon pointed out to me, directors of SF films like Tobe Hooper and Russell Mulcahy cross over to direct music videos for Billy Idol and Duran Duran. For better or worse, we have entered a new space-time continuum, in which mass culture has so absorbed postmodern play with categories of space, time, and the alien, is so involved in cognitive dissonance and cognitive estrangement, that the fantastic becomes commercial routine and SF may be in danger of disappearing as a separable genre.

This is the kind of postmodernist mass culture vividly described in Vivian Sobchack's brilliant book, *Screening Space*. Although television is outside her purview—she mentions MTV only once, briefly—recent developments in television (as well as the advent in SF literature of cyberpunk) seem to reconfirm the validity of her central thesis about the changes which have taken place in American culture within the past decade.

I reviewed Sobchack's *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film* (1980), which I praised as a valuable addition to the small number of serious critical studies of SF film. The present volume is a retitled, enlarged edition of the earlier one. It retains intact her chapters on SF films from 1950-76 and adds an 82-page chapter, "Postfuturism," surveying SF films from 1977-86. The new chapter, a complete monograph in itself, not only updates her book but makes it a far more significant and challeng-

ing work. "Postfuturism" is bolder and more original in approach, more penetrating in its analysis, and more sweeping in its conclusions about the state of SF film and of contemporary American society than the earlier chapters. Her book is now essential reading not only for scholars of SF or SF film but also for anyone interested in theories about and studies of contemporary mass culture.

Sobchack opens her new chapter by saying that in the past ten years there has been a radical change in our everyday lives and in our culture. Changes in technology, symbolized by the popularization of the digital watch, the personal computer, the video game, and the video recorder, have led to "the radical alteration of our culture's temporal and spatial consciousness" (p. 223). And the task of mapping these changes in consciousness and changes in the way we perceive the world and our social relationships has fallen to SF film.

Whereas space travel in 1950s' SF film was aggressive and three-dimensional, in recent films space is "domestic and crowded" (p. 226). Whereas time in previous films progressed by the "teleology of plot," today's SF films tend to randomize events (p. 228). And whereas the alien was the menacing "Other" in the paranoid '50s, now he is more often a cuddly sweetheart. Moreover, as people in contemporary SF films behave more like machines, so the androids, cyborgs, robots, and computers in these films become more human. "In sum, whether mainstream or marginal, the majority of contemporary (and popular) SF films celebrate rather than decry an existence so utterly familiar and yet so technologically transformed that traditional categories of space, time, being, and 'science fiction' no longer quite apply" (p. 230).

Sobchack accounts for these changes as the effects of the new structures of organization of postmodern capitalism.

Born in the USA and with the nuclear age, extended by the mass proliferation of electronic culture, the expansive logic of multinational capitalism has altered the previous sense we lived and made of time, space, and the world.... The logic of late capitalism has radically transformed both the structure of our social lives and the aesthetic character of our cultural representations.... (p. 244)

She uses as her tutor text Fredric Jameson's long essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism."

Sobchack sees the first "Golden Age" of American SF film as coinciding with the introduction of late capitalism or "consumer culture" in the post-World War II period, as technology and culture began to totally replace nature and all branches of the economy became fully industrialized for the first time in history. 1950s' SF films emphasized the fearsomeness, wonder, and strangeness of this new technology. By the second "Golden Age," however (from the late 1970s to the present), technology is no longer strange but familiar and accepted as natural. These recent films "celebrate the consumable artifacts and specular productions of late capitalism" (p. 253).

The rest of her essay discusses the changed perceptions of space, time, and being in recent SF films. Postmodern space is hyper-real or super-real, absolute and totalizing yet decentered. One gets lost in it, as in the example (which Jameson mentions in his essay) of the bewildering circular lobby of

a hotel designed by architect John Portman. Although formally conservative SF films still cling to traditional "deep" space, the space of SF film is now frequently flat, like the screen of a computer or video game. Electronic imaging has invaded film and becomes equated with outer space. In *Tron*, the characters become computer simulations wandering in an electronic landscape. Sobchack cites Jean Baudrillard to the effect that we now live in an environment in which everything is a representation or simulation, so that there is no more reality principle; a cinematographic image is not inherently more "real" than an electronic one.

Along with the flattening and deflation of space goes a compensatory inflation of space. Thus we get SF films filled with clutter and texture, like *Blade Runner* and *Dune*. An excess scenography "substitutes quantity for depth and accumulation for movement" (p. 269). This new "entropic aesthetic" finds pleasure in "trash and waste, pollution and decay" (p. 263); Sobchack interprets this as the triumph of late-capitalist consumer culture. In contrast, films she labels "conservative and regressive," such as *Close Encounters* and *Starman*, are nostalgic for wide-open spaces and night skies (p. 266). In '50s' SF films, we were warned to "watch the skies" for fear of alien invaders, but now that we live in such a cluttered environment, we are nostalgic about open, empty space.

Marginal films, like *Buckaroo Banzai*, *Liquid Sky*, and *Repo Man* simultaneously deflate and inflate space through a "bewildering immersion in constant busyness" (p. 270).

As space becomes more important, time is devalued, along with such temporally related elements as "personal identity, history, and narrative" (p. 272). The relationship between past, present, and future—even the flow of time—itself breaks down. The films of Spielberg and associates, such as *Back to the Future*, are nostalgic not for the real past but for the television past of "Leave It to Beaver." As Jameson says, we are now condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (p. 71).

Even the future is now past. The *Star Trek* films appeal to our nostalgia for the 1960s TV series' version of the future. We are all going "back to the future."

The breakdown of temporal sequence leads to "schizophrenic" narratives like *Repo Man* and *Buckaroo Banzai*, which reject "narrative/temporal logic" for "episodic/spatial logic" (p. 280). However, we accept these films as wacky comedies because schizophrenia has become a cultural style.

As time breaks down, the self as centered subject also breaks down. The emotion most often expressed in contemporary SF film is a free-floating euphoria created by technological display, as in the beatific final sequence of *Close Encounters*. In other words, "special effect" equals "special affect." Both what Sobchack calls "mainstream" and "marginal" SF films decenter and objectify affect, but the marginal films are more playfully aware of this and mock big-budget displays by glorying in their own deliberately tacky special effects.

Just as our concepts of space and time have changed, so has our concept of being. Sobchack claims that because we now all feel alienated, we have

become comfortably familiar with our own alienation. We are no longer as afraid of alien invaders as we were in the '50s. "Today's SF films either posit that 'aliens are like us' or that 'aliens R U.S.'" (p. 293). SF aliens are no longer "Other"; they are images of ourselves. In conservative SF films like *E.T.* or *Starman*, the alien is like us, only *better*, more human. But this still implies that human being is the "original model" against which all being must be judged (p. 297). "Postmodern SF," such as *The Brother from Another Planet*, "suggests that there is no original model for being," and that we are all aliens, whether humans or extraterrestrials; nobody is any better than anybody else (*ibid.*).

In her conclusion, she says that SF is in danger of disappearing as a generic category. SF is supposed to imagine the future, but the future is now perceived as similar to the present or the past. We are now all living inside a postmodern environment, inside "the cultural logic of late capitalism," as Jameson puts it. Since this is our given, we must learn to see it clearly so that we may recognize both its progressive and its catastrophic effects. For example, marginal SF films are progressive because they break down traditional divisions such as male/female or real/imaginary but catastrophic because they dissolve the boundaries between science and fiction which make SF possible as a genre.

Neither marginal nor big-budget films seem capable right now of imagining a future. To satisfy the demand for novelty, big-budget SF films must constantly up the ante in special effects technology; but as costs rise, they grow increasingly conservative and risk-free. Paradoxically, they offer not novelty but the illusion of novelty.

Sobchack ends by echoing Jameson's call for a new political art "that will neither long for the past nor merely re-present the present 'world space of multinational capital'" (p. 304). She finds a possible model for such "post-postmodern" art in Lizzie Borden's feminist SF film, *Born in Flames* (1982).

Her intention is not to present detailed analyses of specific films but instead to establish a theoretical context for a survey of the field. She provides some startling insights into particular films, reconsiders some neglected or possibly misunderstood films, and makes valuable connections between works, demonstrating how many recent American SF films are doing similar things thematically, structurally, or visually.

It is not necessary to agree with all of her judgments of individual films to concur with her central thesis. For example, she praises *Tron* for its visual innovation. I can agree in part and still think that *Tron* is a failed experiment because it attempts to graft aesthetically radical, electronic visuals onto a standard quest plot. In a quest, you need clear spatial coordinates, but electronic space provides none. Sobchack also privileges marginal, low-budget films like *Buckaroo Banzai* (which I consider a mess) over big-budget ones like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*. She perhaps forgets that Lucas and Spielberg took the initial risks and paved the way for the boom in SF film in the past ten years. Without *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* (which are both highly innovative films in their own conservative, nostalgic way) there would be nothing for these low-budget films to parody. Another problem is that her theory cannot adequately account for the exceptions to her categories, such as

all the recent xenophobic films with monstrous aliens, including the remakes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Invaders from Mars*, and *The Thing*, as well as *Gremlins*, *Buckaroo Bonzai* itself, and the enormously popular *Alien* and its sequel *Aliens*.

The main limitation of her theory, however, is that it leans so heavily on Jameson's essay on "Postmodernism"; both the strengths and the weaknesses of his approach are imported wholesale into hers. Jameson is a highly original and inspired Marxist critic, a provocative theoretician who has attempted to create some useful linkages between Marx and Freud in such works as *The Political Unconscious*. But Jameson sees the shadow of the multinational corporations intruding into every aspect of our conscious and unconscious lives and our culture. There is good reason to have reservations about such totalizing, global explanations. Although Sobchack applies Jameson's categories with great skill and insight, surely there are other ways of interpreting contemporary SF films than as the inevitable byproduct of late capitalism.

Also like Jameson, Sobchack is better at aesthetic analysis than at suggesting alternatives—that is, better at diagnosis than prescription. After a lengthy and compelling description of the effects of "the cultural logic of late capitalism," Jameson admits that this new postmodern culture engenders such spatial and social confusion that it paralyzes our "capacity to act and struggle" against it (p. 91). He is unable to say what form a new, radical cultural politics might take, except to specify vaguely that it "will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping..." (*ibid.*). New maps of hell? But "cognitive mapping" hardly seems like inspiring work for passionately committed, revolutionary artists. Sobchack, too, is masterful in her description of films but offers only one example of a progressive SF film, the obscure *Born in Flames*.

Sobchack imports another problem from Jameson. As Dan Latimer argues in "Jameson and Postmodernism," Jameson is "relentlessly Hegelian," addicted to dialectical thought but averse to moralizing (p. 127). Thus, on the one hand Jameson claims that postmodern culture is the "superstructural expression" of a new wave of American global military and economic domination, and thus based on "blood, torture, death and horror" (p. 57). Yet, on the other hand, he says that moralizing about historical phenomena is "a category-mistake" (p. 85) and that we are all living inside postmodern culture and thus implicated in what we attempt to denounce (although I wonder just when critics *ever* stood outside their native culture). Jameson's essay is so intellectually cool and aesthetically distanced that he fails to convey any real sense of shock or horror about postmodern culture or about the economic relations which it supposedly represents. As Latimer mentions, "Marx admits the possibility of an independent morality based on the consciousness of human dignity" (p. 127).

Sobchack too, while a committed feminist (see, for example, her fine essay, "The Virginity of Astronauts") does not fully integrate her aesthetic analysis with her ideological concerns here. Thus her nod to a feminist SF film comes on the last page and is the only mention of feminism in the book.

Finally, perhaps Jameson and Sobchack overstate their case. Marxism is always predicting that capitalism will collapse of its own contradictions; if we are now in the stage of "late capitalism," then the apocalypse must be imminent. Moreover, if what Jameson and Sobchack claim is true, and we are faced with a collapse of the categories of space, time, history, and the centered self, then this is genuine cause for alarm in a presumably democratic society. Yet I sense little alarm in their essays. Instead, like the postmodern novelist Thomas Pynchon, they seem to delight in rummaging through the trash heaps of post-World-War-II American pop culture, celebrating the omnipresent evidence they uncover there of entropy and decay. And, I confess, I groove on this junk also. Maybe we have all been living too long inside Pee-wee's playhouse!

Despite these qualifications, *Screening Space* deserves the attention of everyone in our field. It is an important book, an indispensable book for critics of SF film, SF, or contemporary mass culture. Read it, and you will never view SF film in quite the same way again.

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David Y. Hughes

Desperately Mortal

David C. Smith. *H.G. Wells, Desperately Mortal: A Biography*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1986. xviii + 634pp. \$28.00.

This is a major study based on an unequalled familiarity with H.G. Wells's papers, correspondence, and unreprinted writings. In a congenial and informal fashion, David Smith simply knows more about Wells than anyone else, with the possible exception of Anthony West. Some things this book is not. It is not concerned with Wells's childhood, which gets a rather cursory chapter, nor, therefore, in any depth with his religious, psychological, or class foundations. It is devoid of literary criticism or discussion of literary influences on or by Wells. It affords only a sketchy account of the public figure of Wells, whether among the Fabians, on early committees working towards the League of Nations and later the United Nations, or in the presidency of PEN, the literary society. Smith's method, instead, is to document—very often in their own words—what Wells and his current and long-term associates and friends thought about him and his activities over the years: about the “desperately mortal” man's marriages, mistresses, houses, travels, and Gargantuan literary, educational, and futurist projects. Of course, Wells is Smith's hero—no secret from the beginning.

For one trained in literature and accustomed to view Wells from that perspective, reading Smith has proved rewarding, more than might be expected. It is a snide commonplace that Wells's later fiction is a transcript of his life. On the other hand, from Smith's study of the life one cannot help concluding that it was the other way round; that the life imitated the art. Now, this is not Smith's own message, necessarily, for he says very little about the art in any case. The late Robert P. Weeks (who may or may not be known to Smith) pointed out over 30 years ago in “Disentanglement as a Theme in H.G. Wells'[s] Fiction,” that the pattern of a Wells story invariably involves the breaking down of barriers—social, or economic, or even the natural ones of time and space—a break-out accompanied by sensations of dizzy exhilaration—followed by the recrudescence of the status quo, often with deadly-ironic force. Weeks went on to suggest that the narrative nevertheless winds up with the initial optimism not so much dissipated as transformed into a “tough hopefulness.” Finally, Weeks surmised in passing that the likeliest impulse for this special fictional world was the accident of Wells's birth into the servant stratum of the rigid Victorian order and then his success

against all odds in beating his way to the top. However, the pattern of exhilaration and frustration exists in Wells's writing from the beginning, already in *The Time Machine* (when Wells was nobody), and his later life turns out to imitate it.

The paradigmatic act of Wells's personal life is sexual revolt. Weeks said that Wells's fiction "presents us with a unified world that limits its inhabitants, provokes their rebellion, and then frustrates their flight." In his own story of his life, Wells recalled his "enterprising promiscuity" in his first marriage and the *modus vivendi* that liberated him sexually in his second marriage (*Experiment in Autobiography* [hereafter *EA*] pp. 353, 361-92). Some of the names, dates, and circumstances have been brought out in studies by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, Gordon Ray, and Anthony West, and in Wells's own *H.G. Wells in Love* (1984—hereafter *HGL*). Smith, though basing his book "almost entirely on primary sources" (p. 493), adds relatively few names while covering the same ground afresh (but Margaret Sanger gets more attention than previously). Still, the proportions of Wells's rebellion are unnerving and bear reviewing. In the first place, then, he occasionally used prostitutes. Revealingly, he liked to repeat an anecdote that he had had "a reaction" after a "high level" conversation with Teddy Roosevelt and asked the cabby to take him to a black whorehouse (*HGL*, p. 65; Smith, p. 600, n. 85, notes that Wells told the story at a stag dinner in 1930). Then there was a "passade" or "stroke of mutual attraction" (*EA*, p. 391), which according to Anthony West happened at the rate of "three or four a year" from about 1900 onwards (p. 94). In this regard, a few names come to light, in Smith and elsewhere—Nell de Boer, Rosamund Bland, Ella D'Arcy, Violet Hunt (all from Fabian days), Cicely Hamilton, and a certain Hedwig Verena Gatternigg, who made news by attempting suicide in Wells's quarters—but most remain anonymous: an "American widow," "a very pleasant red-haired widow," and so forth (*HGL*, pp. 108-09, 190-92). All these, though, were incidental to the major liaisons, those with Dorothy Richardson, Amber Reeves, Elizabeth von Arnim, Rebecca West, Margaret Sanger, Odette Keun, Moura Budberg, and seemingly one or two as yet nameless. Reeves and West each bore Wells a child, Richardson apparently miscarried. Such are his credentials as a sexual rebel.

Weeks noted that Wells's fictional world "limits" and "provokes" its inhabitants. It is no news that the Victorian proprieties have a long reach, but Smith's researches are illuminating. When it was put about in 1922 that Wells should stand down from running for Parliament because he was a "cad," Beatrice Webb said in her diary: "hardly relevant if it is sexual morality which is to be the test" (p. 275). Gary Hart might or might not dispute her. But Wells knew the risks as only a Victorian could. In 1911, at a crisis in his sexual affairs, in this case the uproar over his daughter by Amber Reeves, he sought advice of his former teacher and father-like friend, Sir E. Ray Lankester, a distinguished biologist. Lankester thought Wells over, then wrote him that women fall into two groups, the one "naughty but nice," the other "angelic" or "angeloid," and commented: "I always placed the second on a pedestal and should as soon [have] thought of temporary amusement or passionate outburst with one of them as robbing a bank." Lankester funned with

the first group, avoided even a sexual glance at the anatomy of the second, and held that the "aberrant angelic female" or "sport" (biologically speaking, of course) must be educated, gotten to a nunnery, or in the worst case "spayed." As for Wells, he had unluckily been led off by a "quasi-angelic" into disregarding "the merits of professional ladies" (pp. 192-94). Thus Lankester, a bachelor, in this piece of mainline Victorian pleading, exonerated Wells via the virgin/harlot version of racial purity. By the same token, though, to those unfriendly to Wells, he would be the cheeky "little cad" in the Fabian Nursery: the one who robbed the bank. Wells was willing; and, on the other hand, the power structure had "provoked" him.

Weeks further remarked that Wells's fictional world "frustrates" the flight of its inhabitants but that they emerge with a "tough hopefulness." In life, Wells emerged far less neatly than that, but resilient always. To begin with, illicit sex *makes* entanglement; the escape becomes the trap; each affair fuels the next. As Smith observes, even the ever-patient Amy Catherine had complicity not just by tolerating the affairs but by the act of having eloped with Wells from his first wife (p. 195). For Wells himself the game was always worth the candle. He said two years before he died, "it is the old men who feel they haven't had their whack of fun who become nasty old boys at the end" (p. 427). However, it takes two to tango and Wells was—in part—flagrantly male-chauvinist. For example, the role of the woman in *A Modern Utopia* (1905) is to have a state-supported career of Motherhood, her special province, where she will not suffer because of "her incapacity for great stresses of exertion, her frequent liability to slight illnesses, her weaker initiative, her inferior invention and resourcefulness, [and] her relative incapacity for organisation and combination" (p. 187); and, equally typical, there is the Miss Minniver caricature of the suffragettes in *Ann Veronica* (1909). In the light of such sentiments, it is not surprising that Wells as late as 1936 claimed to disbelieve in "any male equivalent to menstruation or to the menopause" or that at various times he found employment for at least three of his former lovers as his typists and proof readers (p. 596, n. 49; pp. 184, 365, 418). On the other hand, by his advocacy of birth control and of state provisions for child care, he played a major part in opening up the fact of the social and economic slavery of women for frank discussion. Also, on the personal side, the notorious fracas with Odette Keun—his walling their home in two, for which she paid him out in *Getting to Know the English* and he returned the favor in *Apropos of Dolores*—is balanced by the enduring regard of Amber Reeves, Moura Budberg, and Margaret Sanger. Very moving is Margaret Sanger's farewell, beginning "so darling H.G. you have gone out to the Great Beyond," her barely legible, half-incoherent love letter penned on the day she heard of his death (p. 407). On balance, "tough hopefulness" expresses a truth about Wells in himself and within his private circles.

Smith himself is somewhat evasive about Wells and women. He claims that Wells was "a feminist, in the sense that he crusaded for equality for women and believed in an androgynous life" (p. 178). There is some merit in this claim, but Smith leaves too many loopholes. The black whorehouse gets a footnote; the Gatternigg episode gets a mention; proof that Wells was

"no philistine" includes his support of Violet Hunt (p. 173) among other literary lights (but no mention in the book is made of the affair they had had); a trip to Hollywood means that among the "nubile young women," "Wells was close to heaven, one supposes" (p. 394)—so coy, this, if compared to Wells's words on Peat, his agent, arranging New York for him: "accommodating young ladies appear at his call, and he is mindful of the needs of his client" (*HGL*, p. 224)—and, without denying Wells's opposition to suffragists, Smith minimizes its virulence, and apparently concurs with Wells in that (in Smith's paraphrase) "women were not at war with men, but with sexual urges, and he counselled against 'foolish feminism'" (p. 539, n. 28). On the other hand, Smith insists, relevantly, upon Wells's long term relationships with women where sex did not figure. In the case of Enid Bagnold, Wells pursued her, she refused, was later willing, but by then Rebecca was in the way, and they simply became good friends. All of this Bagnold preserved, and Smith quotes the letters at some length (pp. 194-95). A close relationship with Christabel Aberconway followed the same pattern (pp. 394-95). Elizabeth Healey was another simply good friend, from the 1880s onwards; so, too, was Eileen Power of Oxford, from about the time she contributed to later editions of *The Outline of History* (p. 392). The list goes on. It takes some of the force out of the womanizing.

Of course, sexual rebellion was only the most proscribed of Wells's break-outs. Another was the creative act itself: "A scholar may be a gentleman, a novelist may be a decent citizen, history may be honourable, criticism even respectable, but the true creative author has a gambling spirit, a taverning temperament, and brawling in his blood" (Smith, p. 39; quoted from the 1894 essay, "The Disreputableness of Authorship"). For Wells, the gambling spirit paid off. Smith's seemingly compulsive recurrence to the details of Wells's transactions with his publishers and agents is simply a faithful rendering of Wells's aggressive obsession with the pounds and pence, wrung from his writings, that enabled him to travel, mingle with aristocracy, and underwrite the multiple households that his love life exacted—an obsession testified to by thousands of the documents Smith has consulted.

For Smith, however, the overarching "disentanglement" was what Wells famously phrased (as early as 1902) as "The Discovery of the Future," when, in addressing the Royal Society, he contrasted the hindward-looking mindset of classical humanists with the forward-looking mindset of scientists, associating himself with the latter. That is, for Smith, the merely private defiances become assimilated to a public furtherance of the potentialities of human freedom, broadening down Wells's long, active life (nearly to the mid-century mark). Also, for Smith, the unquestioned desirability of Wells's future colors even the book's dedication: "To Joshua in the heartfelt hope and desire that his world might turn out to be a Wellsian one." Indeed, so fully does Smith identify with Wells as maker of the future, that he inscribes the following eccentric credo: the study of Wells "has convinced me that the end does, did, and will always justify the means. If art must be sacrificed to truth, so be it" (p. 481).

Given this utilitarian bias, the life Smith writes centers away from Wells's art and onto his message and example, so that "truth" in Wells is

seen as a recipe for action and his "art" as a shell surrounding it. The very shape of the book makes this emphasis. Quite aside from the fact that discussion of the SF and novels is limited to brief statements of plot-lines and ideas, Smith's pragmatist spirit slights Wells's first 35 years and dwells on the man-of-the-world of the last 45. The ratio is about 75 pages to 410 pages, exclusive of the 121 total pages of annotation. Thus, telescoping Wells's pre-university years into the first 7 pages, Smith uses the next 40 to describe Wells's training to be a science teacher and his concomitant early science journalism and two early textbooks. Then half a page is given to the importance for Wells of dreams and waking dreams as a pipeline to the subconscious. Within 50 pages, this arbitrary mix establishes him as a pedagogue and fractionally a visionary. Two quotations from Wells, out of many others, will give the drift: "the danger arising to humanity out of invention, the danger of the extreme complication of life, is only to be met by education"; and: "there are two chief aspects from which we may survey almost any question of human interest....We may regard things as they are, or we may regard things as they might be" (pp. 33, 42). The point here is the dates, 1899 and 1894 respectively, because they reveal that Wells accompanied the SF for which he is known in this period with a substantial body of essays that spoke in the straightforwardly didactic and discursive voice which is commonly associated only and increasingly with the Wells of the years after 1900. Once this didactic voice has been established, then in about 35 pages (disproportionately few of them addressed to the major SF, through *The First Men in the Moon*), Smith reads this voice, and only this voice, into all of the SF through *The World Set Free* at the start of World War I. Thus, *The Time Machine* teaches "the view that if we will only anticipate the future, we can create a world in which the Eloi and Morlocks live in a symbiosis without the cruel death the Traveller sees"; *Moreau* and *The Invisible Man* are "attacking science run amok"; and the message of *The War of the Worlds* is "the need for co-operation" (pp. 60, 61, 67). Smith reserves special acclaim for *The Food of the Gods* (1904)—ignored or panned by critics from G.K. Chesterton onwards—first, because it shouts its message (Wells later called it, wordily, his "completest statement of the conception that human beings are now in violent reaction to a profound change in conditions demanding the most complex and extensive readjustment in the scope and scale of their ideas"; Smith, p. 69), and then, second, because the story-line is more or less detachable from the thesis. Smith notes that Wells actually did two versions of the book, one with more action, including a chapter on giant kangaroos, for consumption in *Pearson's Magazine*, and one that omitted this chapter and instead interpolated lengthy expository reflections, as published in book form (p. 69); so, in Smith's estimation—and the more so the more literate the audience—the message is the thing. Of course, these are astounding reductions of the true achievement of Wells's early SF, yet they undeniably advance the general sense conveyed by Smith that "disentanglement" was the driving force of Wells's life and thought. Smith offers equally encapsulated views of Wells's major attempts at the novel and the utopia during this period of his greatest purely literary fame.

As Wells's fiction later becomes increasingly discursive, topical, and autobiographical, Smith's methodology looks better and better, and still better with the "prig" and discussion novels, and soundest of all when Wells shoots clean out of fiction into the likes of *The Outline of History*, *The Science of Life*, and *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*. Essentially, what Smith shows is that Wells's emergent internationalism and growing commitment to the idea of the world-state led him to broadcast the message through every forum at his disposal and through his actions. Besides exploiting all major literary genres except poetry and drama (with which he experimented unsuccessfully), he wrote film scripts, only the most notable of them for Korda's *Things to Come*; he authorized frequent dramatizations of his works on the B.B.C. and personally aired his views in a series of talks on world affairs; he travelled several times to America and once to Australia on lecture tours; and he undertook lengthy correspondences and negotiations on behalf of individuals such as Eduard Benes and causes such as that of birth control, activities culminating when he was in his upper 70s in the campaign for the Declaration of Human Rights; and he also stood twice for Parliament. Smith's procedure in organizing these materials is to trace Wells's performance in each area separately—with the negative outcome that under different heads the same dates and the same issues recur with monotonous regularity, but with the positive outcome that Wells's resourcefulness and "tough hopefulness" deliver a cumulative punch. Not only were Wells's activities concurrent, but any one or two of them would exhaust most careers. Meanwhile, with each book, each performance, Smith pauses to take stock of its reception by the public and by an inner circle of friends and colleagues (literary and non-literary), especially Sir Richard Gregory of *Nature*, Healey, Tommy Simmons (all from student days), Lankester, Bennett, Shaw, Beatrice Webb, Graham Wallace, Frank Swinnerton. These form a sort of chorus to the action (of writing, lecturing, running for office, and so on), with the effect for the reader that Wells's life, so absorbed in these enterprises, appears indissolubly part of his work, which was always the prime mover: his work or his art.

Here a pause for the reviewer's mandatory exhibit of howlers, large and small. Wells was not at Byatt's school for two years (pp. 9, 499, n. 10), but for one; the Martians are not "insect-like" (p. 65), but in size like a bear, in form like an octopus, and in reproduction like a plant; it is not true that "there has been no detailed analysis" of Wells's short stories (p. 73), quite the opposite, though no exclusive study exists; it is not true that in "The Rediscovery of the Unique" Wells "put the point that unique qualities perceived by humans...are illusory" (p. 502), but rather that the *classification* of uniques is illusory; it is not true that the fornication on the newspaper bearing Mrs Humphrey Ward's strictures on sexual morality involved Elizabeth von Arnim (p. 211), but rather Amber Reeves; either it is not true that A.M. Davies died in 1943 (pp. 399, 556, n. 14) or it is not true that he attended Wells's cremation in 1946 (p. 479); and it is not true that Gissing read the proofs of *The War of the Worlds* in 1898 or that Conrad read *The Time Machine* while travelling in Turkey (pp. 152, 163), as the time and the place are both skewed. So are the plots of two books. The Rebecca West

figure (Martin Leeds) in *The Secret Places of the Heart* (1922) is converted into the Amy Catherine figure (Lady Hardy) while the latter is omitted entirely (p. 397). The Vicar (not a curate) in *The Wonderful Visit* (1895) does not "fall somewhat in love" with the Angel (p. 205) because, although (1) the Angel's androgynous demeanor occasions a scandalous rumor of a woman in the Vicarage, nevertheless (2) the Angel is unequivocally male, and he (3) loves Delia, the maid.

A larger problem is *non sequitur*. Near the end of the book, Smith belatedly contrasts a "dark Wells" with a "more powerful and significant Wells of light" (pp. 442, 458) and remarks that "from *The Time Machine* to *Mind at the End of its Tether*, Wells had believed it possible [that 'negative ends might not come'], but thought it very unlikely" (p. 447). This statement seems to say, curiously, that the "powerful and significant Wells" rejected his own deepest belief, which was pessimism. In any event, Smith rejects pessimism for him, by simply suppressing much mention of it up to this point. However, the "dark" Wells—and Smith's evasion of that aspect—has already been noted in regard to Wells's sexual relations and to his SF, in both cases blatant. Indeed, Wells was "desperately mortal" more than Smith acknowledges, and his tenacity was by so much the greater than Smith appreciates.

But for all its eccentricities, blind sides, and unlicked redundancies, this book is a valuable (not so much public as) personal record of Wells, the most personal yet—far more so than *Experiment in Autobiography*, which so frankly regards its subject as a sociological specimen (though *H.G. Wells in Love* is a more private book within its limited scope). A good memoirist, Smith brings the reader into the Wells circle, at first narrow, then enormously expanding. Smith himself is a historian. Thus—in fairness it must once again be emphasized—Robert P. Weeks and the theme of "disentanglement" may or may not reflect Smith's intent (there is no telling whether or not he has read almost any given secondary source); Weeks's "disentanglement" is merely the organizing principle that best expresses (and sharpens) the book's direction for the present reviewer.

Once again to point that direction, here—gathered from throughout Smith's notes and text—are half-a-dozen typical glimpses of the Wellsian spirit of fun, rebellion, or release, whether for himself or for humankind. Towards the end of his life, Wells disclaimed a "rungs-of-the-ladder" gloss on his ascent to fame: "I'm not very attracted to the 'early struggle' business," he wrote in 1936; "I never wanted to get on. Mostly I wanted to get out of disagreeable things" (p. 577, n. 12). This had been the personal motive: the past was what one got out of. Then the futurist fictions about an escaped past (our present)—the first of them *The Time Machine*—gave to the fugitive motive the form, substance, and authority of a quasi-historical mode of action. Reflexively, as suggested above, Wells formed himself upon these fictions, for which he sought further verification through hoped-for action in the public domain aimed at enlargement of humanity from the bonds of the past. History itself might be prompted to "break out." Thus, just 10 days into the guns of August, Wells was writing of a "new period in history": "We have to redraw the map so that there shall be, for just as far

as we can see ahead, as little cause for warfare among us Western nations as possible....That means we have to redraw it justly. And very extensively" (p. 236). Note the scale of enlargement. Seen large enough, in fact, humankind's common origins imply a common destiny. In *The Outline of History*, Ernest Barker saw "a keen sympathetic imagination driving through history, the sweep of the panorama makes me almost breathless....It is what I imagine an aeroplane is like in the physical world" (p. 556, n. 14). But the private and "desperately mortal" face of Wells is Smith's forte, of which now finally three glimpses: Wells told PEN on his 70th birthday that he felt like a small boy, Master Bertie, told to put away his toys, saying, "I hate the thought of leaving" (p. 423); and eight years later as the sole resident still sticking it out on Hanover Terrace during the buzz bombs, he wrote Elizabeth Healey that "panic-stricken boors" were fleeing to the country, but "here I am in the middle of it and only one window cracked by the concussion of an A.A. gun on Primrose Hill" (p. 473). Perhaps he recalled the Primrose Hill of dead London in *The War of the Worlds*? Lastly, reconciled with Beatrice Webb, he wrote her in 1942 about the old disputes over Fabian tactics: "It's hard to judge, in the retrospect, because *what might have been* cannot be produced for comparison" (p. 472). Alternative pasts formed no part of Wells's "tough hopefulness." One is grateful for such a life, which Smith helps substantially to illuminate.

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Knowledge is Ignorance

Andrew Martin, *The Knowledge of Ignorance: From Genesis to Jules Verne*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1985. x + 259pp. \$39.50.—As Andrew Martin notes in his introductory chapter, the title he has selected for his volume poses significant problems. It implies a subject as vast in time and space as the universe or as profound and enigmatic as the intellect. Indeed, such an essay must begin with Genesis or before and can end anywhere and nowhere. That he chose to culminate his essay with Jules Verne, though startling, is understandable once one has grasped the book's structure; yet Verne is not really the end of the book, because he merely represents a writer whose work embodies man's desire for omniscience while demonstrating that the more man knows the more he recognizes his ignorance:

The *Voyages*, anticipating the closure of the circle of knowledge, the attainment of omniscience, aim to supplant mimesis by mathesis, deploying science to abolish fiction. But the Vernian savant is always threatened, in the course of his journeys of intellectual discovery, by the catastrophic reduction of science to nescience. (pp. 6-7)

But it is not just man's recognition of his ignorance; it is an understanding that nescience and omniscience are not opposites but reversible processes: "the fragmentation of scientific discourse suggests that knowledge and ignorance, science and literature, epistemophilia and anepistemophilia, are not mutually exclusive but inseparable" (p. 7). Thus Martin's book can have no real ending in any writer or period. Indeed, the book itself cannot end as discourse, because discourse and time are inseparably linked within the transition between nescience and omniscience. Both discourse and time are imperfect fragmentations of man's attempted understanding of a universe which, because it is beyond his understanding, he describes as infinite and eternal, static states in which time and transition have no meaning and can never become means of comprehension. After all, in the sense of Godhead omniscience and nescience become meaningless terms. They are linguistic formulations by which man attempts to describe and define something beyond his comprehension. For even in employing such expression as "all" and "whole," "omniscient" and "infinite," man is clearly thinking in finite terms. The whole implies something that can be encompassed and omniscience suggests that there is an all to be known. Man can only perceive in terms of transition; he thinks in terms of time and he measures space, as if one moved from nothing to something. He conceives of the universe as a place and thinks that it is an ark or archive, a definable entity which one can explore and hence move from ignorance to full knowledge. Thus, as long as man is man, Martin's book can have no ending, for an ending would represent a natural conclusion to a creature of transition who can only think that all things in transition must have a beginning and an end.

Although to include the name of Verne as the conclusive term in such a high-sounding title causes one to draw back for a moment and to wonder about the

author's seriousness, there is no doubt that Martin is serious and has written a very provocative and interesting volume which, though by no means attempting to discuss all of Western literature and civilization in terms of his theme, does so in a philosophical way by choosing a perspective which reflects broadly these opposite but not opposing paths to knowledge or understanding: nescience and omniscience.

In an abstract sense one might say that there are three modes which describe man's understanding of essential forms: at one end of the spectrum are vacuum, absence, and ignorance, in themselves forms of perfection because unique and whole; on the other end are plenitude and omniscience, which, by their completeness, are also images of perfection. What lies between, of course, is a transition from one state to the other, a temporal mode which represents the imperfect state of man.

In his chapter entitled "Nescience and Omniscience," Martin focusses on three historical moments in Western civilization: Genesis, the Renaissance, and the French Revolution and its aftermath. For Martin, genesis is both a moment in philosophical time and an event which has specific significance in intellectual history. As an event, it represents the perfect moment of ignorance for humankind, a period prior to the use of language when man, in his total ignorance, formed a perfect unity with his Creator. In fact, the omniscient Creator's need for creation is presented as deriving from his need to know all, even ignorance. Once man had acquired knowledge, of course, the perfection of complete ignorance was lost. Indeed, once ignorance was lost the way to perfection or to rejoining the Creator could only lie in complete knowledge. Thus the Scriptures represent man's hesitant attempt at reconciliation with the Godhead and yet are themselves emblematic of the cleavage which exists between man and his Creator.

The Renaissance is presented as a period in which man believed in knowledge, a period which sought to recover the lost knowledge of the ancients. Yet, for Martin, figures like Erasmus and Montaigne realized the futility of attempting to learn all and manifested a skepticism regarding the ability of man's intellect to know. And in Rousseau he sees the dilemma of humankind caught between a nostalgic desire for complete ignorance or innocence and the desire for omniscience expressed perfectly in Julie:

Thus *La Nouvelle Héloïse* operates as a sexual parable of the dilemma of epistemic man. The anepistemological ideal examined in Rousseau's writing, of attaining the state of knowing without the impediment of knowledge, of being simultaneously ignorant and knowledgeable, is mirrored in Julie's exactly analogous fantasy of loving without ever having loved, of possessing without being possessed, of being an amorous virgin. (p. 54)

For Martin, Julie is a "post-lapsarian being clinging to the illusion of prelapsarian innocence" (p. 54).

But if the 18th-century revolution was anti-intellectual in its political ideology, the aftermath of bourgeois dominance reinstated the goal of omniscience and science. Ignorance, which Renaissance and post-Renaissance man relegated to a period of time called the Middle Ages, came to be located in the 19th century in the Orient, the spatial equivalent of the Middle Ages. In sections dealing with Hugo, Napoleon, and Chateaubriand, Martin explores 19th-century Positivism and the idea of Western intellectual and cultural superiority—this in a chapter entitled "The Occidental Orient." Here the volume becomes less philosophical and more literary and historical in orientation as Martin traces the 19th-century belief in science and knowledge in the poetic imagery of Hugo, the ideas of Beaudelaire and Chateaubriand, and the political plans of Napoleon.

Finally, in the longest section of the book, Martin discusses various formal patterns and subjects in the œuvre of Jules Verne which reflect his works' concern with the question of science and the universe, fiction and reality. He explores Verne's use of emblematic images (such as the shark in *Les Enfants du capitaine Grant*), "reflexive images duplicating in miniature the configuration of a text or texts, emblematic *résumés* of plot or theme" (p. 123). He relates Verne's use of themes such as nutrition and cognition to his own central thesis and he demonstrates the key role that *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* plays in the work as a whole. Not only does that work itself epitomize the novels in the entire collection in Martin's view, but the *Nautilus* is a microfigure of the Vernian *opus*. It is both ark and museum, a seaborne encyclopedia, a well-ordered closed space both temporal and aesthetic: "it is the physical counterpart to the closure of history that is the prerequisite of epistemic totalization..." (p. 155). For Martin, Verne's fiction is itself modelled on the *Nautilus*: "it is a library of quotations, allusions, references: a bibliography of nineteenth-century science" (p. 156).

Perhaps one of Martin's more telling observations regards Verne's relation to SF as a genre. As Martin notes, Verne was very skeptical of fiction and the wholesale use of imagination, especially in regard to the material world. If what man perceives was subjective in Verne's view (a traditional 19th-century neo-platonic perspective), the universe was, contrarily, an objective reality which science attempted to apprehend in its absolute quality. Thus Verne admitted readily the use of fiction in creating plots and characters but absolutely refused to venture beyond current scientific knowledge or speculation when dealing with the "objective reality" of the universe. As Martin puts it, the *descriptible* is bounded by what has already been described, while the *scriptible* is identical with the *déjà-écrit*. Thus Verne's SF maintains a strict distinction which prevents futuristic fantasizing from becoming part of his narrative: "Verne's scientific romances are less futuristic fantasies than nostalgic permutations of inherited categories and contraptions" (p. 6). Verne's *De la terre à la Lune* and *Autour de la Lune* prove amply the accuracy of Martin's observation. Nothing Verne says about the Moon or the means of getting there exceeds current scientific speculation on the known. Moreover, when such speculation was lacking, he tended toward hasty generalizations rather than elaborate fantasies.

But if Martin's book provides much material that is insightful, there are also problems one should not overlook. One may readily question von Rad's reticence at seeking a divine purpose in God's prohibition that man not eat of the tree, but to assert that the prohibition involves acquisition of knowledge itself is questionable. After all, for man to live as a conscious human being would involve learning and thought. In the chapter on Genesis, Martin struggles to maintain the binary structure he posits. He turns away from useful historical interpretations of Genesis that had enormous influence on the minds and art of subsequent periods. At times one finds sophistic questions which depend on an anthropomorphic image of God. To show that God's omnipotence and omniscience are in fact defective (to be omniscient one could not know ignorance), he makes up several things that God could not do: he could not, e.g., build a wall over which he could not jump. It is one thing to say that no wall could be built which God, taking the shape of a man, could not jump, but to make image of the infinite creating something outside of itself is to think of the infinite in human terms. To say that omniscience cannot know ignorance is to give substance to ignorance or to imagine that omniscience cannot know ignorance without becoming ignorant or in some way taking on ignorance, thereby destroying omniscience.

In Martin's treatment of Montaigne there is a similar problem. Interesting as Martin's binary use of omniscience and nescience is, it does not seem that Montaigne's critique of *raison* in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* involves the question of nescience. To be sure, Montaigne's alleged *apologia* undercuts the argument it seemingly sets out to support. But his skepticism of man's *raison* only involves the challenge of *raison* in questions of theology or faith. There is no denial of learning in the Renaissance concept of physical science. It may be surprising to find, but Montaigne's essay is in the great tradition of theological discourses, in the tradition of Abelard's *Sic et Non* and consistent with his loud proclamation that he never intended to question faith with man's reason.

In the discussion of the 19th-century idea of the "mission civilisatrice" of Western Europe (here France in particular), Martin readily condemns this train of thought as a sham. To see the idea as a hoax by means of which Western capitalism could justify itself in taking from other societies what rightfully belonged to them is to misconstrue history. (A similar gross error in the interpretation of crusading motivation in earlier medieval scholarship is being rectified by the scholarship of the past three decades.) The "mission civilisatrice" has a long history which extends at least to Chrétien de Troyes' preface to *Cligés* and the sense that both *clergie* and *chevalerie* now belong to France and must be maintained and transmitted. By the end of the 17th century, the belief in France in its own moral, intellectual, and artistic superiority over the rest of Western Europe should not be underestimated. It is this great sense of classic art in aesthetic matters which allows Eugène Fromentin, basically an anti-colonialist by the standards of his day, to watch a native festival with great interest, even fascination, but to proclaim that it is really not art, only *spectacle*. (It is curious to me that modern critics, often consumed by the idea that there can be no absolute history, nonetheless refuse to acknowledge the legitimate historical biases brought about by relativism and proceed to criticize earlier generations for not sharing the relative bias of the modern age!) Our age is currently experiencing an anti-scientific reaction, an abhorrence of the 19th century's faith in progress and belief that science can solve all human problems. The idea that acquisition of knowledge could be a prototype for the very notion of possession is interesting. This mode of thought may well be at work in an abstract intellectual sense. But the historical consciousness of the period should be taken into account in assessing such motives.

To conclude, one may return to the appropriateness of using an author of Verne's stature as the culminating essay in a book involving questions so philosophically oriented. Until the 1970s, Verne was perceived almost exclusively as an author of adventure books, largely thought of as an author who appealed mostly to children. Since the early 1970s, however, many critics have begun to focus on his works seriously. Is it the case of a novelist long misunderstood whose time has finally come? Probably not. It has rather to do with the change in values of modern literary criticism. Post-1960s' criticism has eschewed the traditional 19th-century novel and its preoccupation with psychology and history. The idea that history is nothing but a record left by people hopelessly prisoners of their own biases has turned history into a form of fiction and prevents one from considering history in the absolute terms in which it was conceived in the 19th century. Thus documents are seen not so much as historical bearers of fact as they are the observations of people living in another age. In a completely relative perspective, even science becomes only a mathematical reflection of man's own necessarily biased and limited perspective on the universe. As C.S. Lewis noted in his *The Discarded Image*, the Copernican model is not the permanent, absolute reality of the universe; it is an image which

answers for our time. Martin notes that Verne's work comes at a turning point in Western thought: "The *Voyages* register the transition from the subordination of fiction to a scientific view of literature (as mimesis) to the subordination of physics to an aesthetic view of science (as imaginative construct)" (p. 174). With this end of the last bastion of an absolute reality (the physical sciences), modern criticism has, in a sense, turned to itself as a kind of science:

Science, then, does not so much resemble literature as both resemble literary criticism. Thus in philosophy the dominion of epistemology has tended to be usurped by hermeneutics. The ambition of literary criticism to be a science, to reconvert hermeneutics into epistemology, betrays a nostalgia for a lost paradise. (p. 186)

In a sense literary criticism is left unto itself to analyze texts in whose authors and historical subject matter it has no faith or real interest. Verne is not read as an author whose preoccupations were caught up in the idea of 19th-century notions of progress and science. The 19th century is not looked at to see how it differs from or lays the foundation for our own historical and intellectual perspectives.

Nor is Verne the figure, the man, the author really of interest. Rather Verne's œuvre becomes a vast document which has its own absolute *raison d'être* that transcends or is apart from history. This is why Simone Vienne's study of mythic, initiatory archetypes, Moré's psychoanalytic study, and Macherey's Marxist analysis of Verne all more or less work in terms of the structured guidelines these authors set forth as the basis for their works. What is fascinating in the second half of the 20th century is the way in which literary criticism is becoming a genre, practically the only genre in which it is itself interested. As literary criticism seeks to become a science, it creates absolute forms which it denies to other areas of intellectual endeavor. The critic seeks to move to a plane beyond history (which she or he sees as inevitably relative and hopelessly enmeshed in man's psyche) to a beyond which, as Martin so aptly writes, "betrays a nostalgia for a lost paradise." But to move beyond in this way really places man's intellect in the supreme and isolated place which the Positivists claimed as one of the principal errors of the age prior to what they called the "modern period." Our paradoxical refusal to take into account the observations of the mind and senses of others and yet give credence to the workings of our own intellect is narcissistic in the extreme. Our exclusive interest in ourselves and our own views is an ironic form of absolutism in an age which pretends to itself that openmindedness is an admirable and desirable quality.

Martin's book is stimulating, interesting, and entertaining. It is richly suggestive and casts much light on Verne's work as a whole. At times it suffers from the self-conscious and self-indulgent narrowness of our own age. This derives, in large part, from the belief in our own superiority, a superiority which rests upon the firm and smug conviction that we know that man's striving for knowledge can only lead him to the conclusion that he knew as much before he started as he will know when he has finished: that in man's hopelessly relative view, nescience and omniscience really amount to the same thing; that the Knowledge of Ignorance and the Ignorance of Knowledge are phrases which are not only compatible but nearly mean the same thing.

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Feminist Worlds Within Postmodernism

Thelma J. Shinn. *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women*. ["Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy," No. 22.] Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986. xiv + 214pp. \$29.95.—The purpose of Shinn's study is to show "that both the truths uncovered and the surfaces suggested in SF myths by women attempt to offer a future rooted in ancient myth, rejecting the cultural myths of patriarchy" (p. 7). She accomplishes her objective in chapters which discuss redefining patriarchal myth, SF mythmaking in process, female archetypes, and transforming mythic patterns. She directs long overdue attention to such writers as Octavia Butler, C.J. Cherryh, Suzette Hayden Elgin, Sally Miller Gearhart, Sydney J. Van Scyoc, and Joan Vinge by reading their work in terms of Celtic, Arthurian, Golden Age, and African myths. *Worlds Within Women* is a ground-breaking volume, the first book-length thematic study (excluding dissertations) of contemporary female creators of fantastic literature. I have waited a very long time to read a book on these writers and I applaud Shinn's pioneering effort.

Her study is simultaneously broadening and restricting, however. Although Shinn states that she wishes to place "fantastic literature by women in the context of the rediscovery and/or reassertion of 'feminist consciousness' in twentieth-century women's art" (p. 9), she fails to direct a strong feminist consciousness to the imaginative literature she explores. Shinn's distant and timid attitude towards feminism is exemplified by her decision to exclude the word "feminism" from her consideration of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*. Such rhetorical reticence is also apparent when, rather than immediately presenting her own ideas, Shinn begins her preface by conforming to the tired practice of citing various critical works.

Shinn is at her best when she makes new connections between fantastic literature and well-known imaginative and theoretical texts. For example, she reads Andre Norton and Marion Zimmer Bradley in terms of Hawthorne (pp. 70, 162-63), and she brings the ideas of Mary Daly, Geoffrey Hartman, Ellen Moers, and Annis Pratt to bear upon fantastic literature (by women). Textual linkages of this sort facilitate the ability of women's SF to transcend its generic ghetto.

Even though Shinn includes some feminist theoretical voices, she is (as her title announces) concerned with "women," not with feminism. This decision discourages the liberating possibilities which Shinn rightly attributes to SF: "The possibilities inherent in this genre of shifting surfaces—the possibilities of social and cultural as well as individual change—free women from the limits that define them in patriarchal society" (p. 10). But Shinn's rather conservative approach—as well as her title—cancels these possibilities by placing women right back within patriarchally defined limits. Since *Worlds Within Women* is most certainly about women, the subtitle's reiteration of this point becomes a debasing redundancy. Shinn's excellent study is diminished by her failure to realize that "fantastic literature by women" itself exemplifies patriarchal mythmaking. The term implies that "literature by men" is synonymous with "literature" while "literature by women" is an exception to the male norm. Although this point about language is not new, Shinn's title shows that it needs to be reiterated. While she states that "language can alter the way in which we conceive the world" (p. 102), the language of her subtitle reinforces the marginalization of women in the literary world.

Shinn's opening question addresses the position of women in SF's particular literary world. "What have women writers done to SF?" (p. 1) soon changes to "the real question of this introduction...what has SF done for women writers?" (p. 10).

Her answers to these questions, though convincing, do not address another important question: What should women SF critics do for women SF writers? Our agenda should be to refuse to collude with the myth and mythmaking directed towards fantastic literature (by women), to give these works their rightful place in the postmodern canon—to assert once and for all that the writers whom Shinn discusses are not inferior to male postmodernists. More specifically, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Joanna Russ should not receive less attention than John Barth and Kurt Vonnegut, for example. Shinn's study of myth and mythmaking is important because it indicates, albeit indirectly, that like their male postmodern counterparts, female authors of fantastic literature retell tales, create metafiction.

Shinn informs us that "we make a monster out of what is alien to us, as women writers have shown us doing from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Butler's *Survivor*. From this perspective, however, it is our narrowness and exploitation which seems monstrous" (p. 79). Such women writers' works as those just named metafictionally comment upon themselves. Narrow critical approaches have cast "fantastic literature by women" in the role of a misunderstood Frankenstein's monster. Now, with the help of feminist critics, this formerly complacent monster threatens to break free of patriarchal restrictions, to uncontrollably stomp through the terrain of fantastic literature (by men) and wreak havoc over the postmodern literary map.

In the manner of Hélène Cixous's image of the laughing Medusa, the monstrous "fantastic literature by women" should also be newly seen as beautiful and powerful. In the words of Shinn: "When fantastic literature by women is examined as a subgenre of women's fiction, this child is no misbegotten Frankenstein's monster. Rather, it is the butterfly releasing the beauty and power only dreamed of in the caterpillar (which, however, was still only itself trapped in the cocoon of patriarchal expressions and limitations)" (p. 10). Shinn's study does not reveal a butterfly. Rather, she successfully breaks the binding threads of a patriarchal generic cocoon and thus facilitates the emergence of "fantastic literature by women" as an unnamed caterpillar. Her study is an achievement precisely because it finally directs attention to this caterpillar. Shinn celebrates the intrinsic female essence of fantastic literature (by women), celebrates its monstrosity. It is up to other critics to build upon her work, to add feminist insights to the achievement of her initiatory critical exploration.

The metamorphosis of women's SF from cocoon to butterfly will not occur until critics assert that, rather than being a subgenre of women's fiction, feminist fabulation (my name for contemporary "fantastic literature by women") is at the heart of postmodern fiction. Shinn's book—and the studies of feminist SF that follow it—should be understood as part of the feminist literary theory addressing women's place in 20th-century literature. More directly, critical attention to feminist SF should be viewed as a next step in the progression charted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *Worlds Within Women*, a study of postmodern women writers, can be read as a volume appropriately following Gilbert's and Gubar's discussions of women in the 19th century (*The Madwoman in the Attic*) and in the modern period (*No Man's Land*).

A beautiful and powerful laughing Medusa must stand alongside John Barth's Chimera in the postmodern canon. As Jane Gallop reminded us during the recent Illinois State University Conference on Feminism and Psychoanalysis, feminism is a celebration of monsters. Feminist SF critics should establish feminist fabulation's monstrous difference as positive and directly engage feminist theory to announce that our "lost" female postmodernists have been found. Shinn herself advocates a

direct approach: "Uncovering the face of the Goddess and looking directly at it will not turn us to stone, as the cultural myth of Medusa threatens" (p. 192). We can look at Medusa directly and in safety. Cixous has claimed that Medusa is on our side. And Shinn has, after all, shown that the Goddess is a feminist.

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One Out of Three

Marleen S. Barr, Ruth Salvaggio, Richard Law. *Suzy McKee Charnas/Octavia Butler/Joan D. Vinge*. Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House, 1986. \$9.95 (paper).—This volume, No. 23 in Starmont's ongoing series of guides to SF and fantasy authors, does some things right. Grouping Charnas, Butler, and Vinge together in a single volume makes both editorial and economic sense. While arguably none of the three writers has produced a sufficient body of work to warrant a full-length guide, each deserves critical attention; and because Charnas, Butler, and Vinge are all, to varying degrees, feminist, readers interested in the works of any of these authors are likely to be interested in the others. I have no quarrel, then, with the idea of a multiple study. I do, however, have numerous complaints with this volume, in particular with two of its three sections and with its editorial policy—or lack thereof.

To begin with the positive: Ruth Salvaggio's discussion of Octavia Butler, one of only three Black SF writers to date and the only Black woman, is particularly effective. The biography, without being either intrusive to the living author or extrusive in the study, allows us to situate Butler culturally, historically, and (in general terms) psychologically. Salvaggio treats the five novels in the Pattern series (*Patternmaster* [1976], *Mind of My Mind* [1977], *Survivor* [1978], *Wild Seed* [1980], and *Clay's Ark* [1984]), in order of their composition, rather than of internal chronology, and this allows her to elucidate Butler's artistic growth from novel to novel. She then examines *Kindred* (1979), the story of a contemporary young Black woman drawn back in time to the antebellum South, and finally discusses Butler's four short stories. Salvaggio's analysis focusses on Butler's recurring theme, the politics of power: "enslavement and freedom, control and corruption, survival and adjustment" (p. 6), and on the strong Black women who are her typical protagonists. Identifying Butler's place not only among writers of feminist SF but among contemporary Black American writers as well, Salvaggio makes an effective case for Butler's "accomplishment and promise" as a writer. The very effectiveness of her argument makes it doubly disheartening that all of Butler's works except *Dawn*, her newest novel, are out of print. In thus simultaneously making Butler's fiction known and giving us the ammunition to argue for keeping it in print, Salvaggio has performed a useful service both to the author and to her readers, past and potential.

Alas, the same praise cannot be given to the other two studies in this volume. The biographical sketch in Barr's essay on Suzy McKee Charnas is helpful, but otherwise I find the study seriously flawed. The major problem concerns the issue of feminism, not only Charnas's but Barr's as well.

Charnas's fiction is probably the most radically feminist of the three authors, particularly her first two novels, *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978), which examine in turn the insanely misogynistic Holdfast (where

women are treated literally like animals) and the neighboring all-female culture of the Riding Women. The first novel, about the flight of a slave woman named Alldera from Holdfast to the desert home of the Riding Women, is painful reading, particularly for a woman; the second I find an exciting, thought-provoking study of an alternate culture which fulfills Joanna Russ's definition of a feminist utopia—not a perfect place, but a place that is better for women for explicitly feminist reasons. In the Riding Women, Charnas creates a culture grounded in traditional feminist values, one which is cooperative rather than competitive, communal, ecologically sensitive, tolerant, non-hierarchical, geared to the rhythms of women's reproductive cycles and profoundly celebratory of women's capabilities. And since there are no men in this society (the women reproduce by cloning), there is, of course, no rape, no violence against women by men, none of the inequities and iniquities of patriarchy. On the other hand, these women are not idealized characters: despite their "utopian" culture, they have tempers, get angry, get jealous, disagree with and sometimes dislike each other. Interpersonal rivalries are not unheard of, and Alldera is not always comfortable with the idea of joining them.

However, because the male characters in *Walk* are all more or less horrible (though Charnas makes clear that women, if the most abused, are not the only victims of patriarchy in Holdfast; young men also suffer from the reign of the fathers), and because there are no male characters at all in *Motherlines*, the novels have been accused of being "too feminist." The kind of reader who would make such a charge is not hard to guess; but Barr, for reasons of her own, chooses to take that charge so seriously that she devotes her entire essay to defending Charnas's feminism.

There are two problems with this approach. The first is that, in order to argue that Holdfast, far from being an extreme vision, is only a slight exaggeration of reality (and thus to demonstrate that the novels are not "too feminist"), Barr spends most of her essay detailing women's real-world experiences of oppression. But the result is that this polemic largely supplants a more general analysis of the novels. In a journal article on Charnas's novels, such a restricted thesis might be acceptable; in a reader's guide, the treatment is inappropriately narrow, and does the fiction itself a disservice.

Putting Barr's own polemic center stage rather than Charnas's fiction becomes even more problematic when, as in this case, the tone of the discussion grows overheated. Indeed, Barr goes so far as to draw an explicit analogy between real-world sexism and Nazism, supported by quotations from Bruno Bettelheim about concentration-camp victims—an analogy which makes me very uncomfortable. Even if the polemic were appropriate, then, I think Barr's approach mistaken: she not only dignifies the charge of "too feminist" by taking it seriously instead of giving it the attention it deserves (i.e., none), but adopts a tone, both defensive and self-righteous, that would not persuade any reader who could make the charge to begin with. Obviously, a discussion of Charnas's feminism must be central in any analysis of these two novels; but the feminist vision needs to be explained and analyzed, rather than defended.

The opposite problem holds with Barr's approach to Charnas's most recent novel, *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980). Since the central character of this novel is a male vampire, *Vampire Tapestry* has been criticized—by an entirely different group of readers—as "not feminist enough." Once again, Barr devotes much of her discussion refuting this charge, in ways that not only give it more weight than it deserves, but seriously skew her analysis of the novel as well. A paragraph on the subject might be appropriate, but to use it as the thesis of the discussion is to fail to address the book Charnas actually wrote.

My other major complaint about this study: it is badly written. Throughout the text I found irrelevant or at best tangential references which seem intended primarily to validate the essay as a scholarly undertaking, unconvincing analogies (in addition to the sexism = Nazism), and even some simple errors of fact. No one of these blemishes is very significant in itself, but the cumulative effect does matter: it undermines our trust in the critic's judgment, accuracy, and sense of proportion. Finally, on the basic level of composition, this essay is very hard to follow. Barr too often simply juxtaposes her sentences or paragraphs and leaps blithely from one to the next as if the logical connections were self-evident. In many cases, neither immediate connection nor larger sequence is clear. I am still not sure even what events take place in several of the texts Barr discusses. The study, in short, reads like a first draft, like a manuscript produced in a hurry. This fuzziness combined with the ideological squint results in a reader's guide which will do little to help the understanding of those who have already read Charnas or to persuade those who haven't read her to do so.

The primary problem with Richard Law's discussion of Joan Vinge is likewise compositional in nature: he has not decided who his audience is. On the one hand, he presents us with a sentence like: "In the reciprocal-reading game, opposite reception and corresponding pleasures derive largely from mood" (a collection of words whose meaning I still cannot determine)—and then feels the need to define "mood": "i.e., the disposition which a piece by Vinge induces in the reader. Mood refers to the organization of feelings that internal elements—such as content, themes, style, and tone—evoke together" (pp. 9-10). If he is addressing an audience of literary critics to whom the first part of this sentence is (theoretically) intelligible, then the second part is so unnecessary as to be insulting. If Law is addressing his study to high school or college students who need explanations for such terms as "mood," "displacement," the Wheel of Fortune (complete with quoted lyrics from *Carmina Burana*), "Bildungsroman," "collective unconscious," Campbell's myth of the hero, "American Dream," and "plot"(!), a sentence like the first sequence quoted above (only one example of many) will be utterly impenetrable. Either choice (or something in between) would be defensible; refusing to make a choice is not.

Though this is a less important point, I also do not share Law's unrestrained enthusiasm for Vinge as a stylist. Her works, especially the Hugo-winning *The Snow Queen* (1981), have been enthusiastically received by many readers, and personally I find her anthropological perspective a congenial one; but a great stylist she is not—though I would agree that *The Snow Queen* represents a substantial improvement in style over her earlier works. Vinge strikes me as a solid journeyman writer, and nothing in Law's argument persuades me to accept the lofty place in the SF pantheon he assigns her.

Finally, I have several complaints about the format of the volume as a whole. First, why is each study numbered separately, rather than using a single numbering sequence for the entire volume? With typesetting done by computer, renumbering would be so easy that I can see no excuse for putting readers to such inconvenience. At the very least, a master table of contents for the volume as a whole should have been provided, not just the three separate tables for each study. Second, why is there no consistent citational format from study to study? Each critic has adopted the citational and bibliographical forms which most suit her/him, with no effort made to reconcile these with each other. This is a small point, perhaps offensive only to those of us who suffer from compulsive tidiness, but it suggests a kind of editorial laxness and inattention to detail that does not speak well for the series.

In short, then, Salvaggio's essay on Octavia Butler stands out in this volume as useful and effectively written. The same cannot be said for the other two.

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A Model Bibliography

Harvey J. Satty & Curtis C. Smith. *Olaf Stapledon: A Bibliography*. ["Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature," No. 2.] Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1984. xxxviii + 167pp. \$35.00.—So far as I know, the only bibliography of an SF writer that is comparable to this "act of devotion" (p. [xiii]) is Geoffrey H. Wells's of H.G. Wells, and even that will not bear the comparison. Following the guidelines of Fredson Bowers and others, Messrs Satty and Smith have given us the kind of meticulously detailed catalogue of Stapledon's writings that few other authors (in any genre) have been accorded.

Some preliminary idea of what I mean by "meticulously detailed" can be gathered from the introductory statement: "In some cases, we have only been able to determine the date [of book publication] to within two to five days" (p. xxiv). That confession of "inadequacy" may be jocose in its backhanded boastfulness, but it is not facetious. The first main section (designated A) of the bibliography, in particular, offers just about everything in the way of data about Stapledon's book-length works as material entities (including print-runs for each incarnation) short of reproducing dust-jackets, say, or specifying textual differences among editions; and it also indicates which among 100 some-odd North American (and principally US) libraries hold copies of any given edition.

The other main divisions of Satty and Smith's bibliography they reserve for listings of: (B) his "Contributions to Books and Pamphlets" and (C) to "Newspapers and Periodicals"; (D) collaborative efforts published in similar organs and comprising chiefly open letters that Stapledon lent his name to; MSS. of (E) published and (EE) unpublished writings "in Public Archives"; (F) translations; and (G) bibliographies. (Presumably "The Peak and the Town," a 10-page "allegorical autobiography"-cum-short story [p. xiii] which supplements Satty and Smith's Preface, hitherto belonged among the material [un]scheduled in EE.) There are also appendices to (A) and (B) covering reprints, and a "Selected [*sic*] Secondary Bibliography" (arranged chronologically). This last does not include annotations, descriptive or otherwise; but other sections, and most importantly (B) and (C), do.

It is no doubt uncharitable at best to find fault with a work of this calibre, especially when its deficiencies are nugatory. Nevertheless, potential users of the volume should know that its index is not nearly as comprehensive as its record of Stapledon's writings is; so that discovering the entries pertinent to H.G. Wells, say, might require perusal of sections B and C in their entirety: for instance, Stapledon's review of *Star Begotten* (erroneously referred to in Satty-Smith's descriptive summary as "*The Star-Begotten*" [p. 106]) appears in the index under its title ("Mr. Wells Calls in the Martians") but not under "Wells, H.G." This, however, amounts to a mere quibble in regard to a work which we might hope others would try to emulate were it reasonable to suppose that there be other bibliographers around who have Satty's and Smith's competence and dedication *and* who would take on a writer of SF.

I should take this occasion to note that Starmont has finally brought out John Kinnaird's monograph on Stapledon. In some not particularly Stapledonian cosmic balance of things, there may be something appropriate about the chronological symmetry: that my review of the Kinnaird should have appeared three years before its actual publication and this notice of Satty's and Smith's efforts three years after the appearance of theirs. But from a human point of view, my delay in the one case is as regrettable as Starmont's in the other.—**RMP**

NOTES AND CORRESPONDENCE

Alice Hastings Sheldon, 1915-87

On May 19, 1987, Alice Hastings Sheldon shot her husband and then herself in their home in McLean, Virginia. She and Huntingdon Sheldon, who was 84, had been married since 1945, and both had been suffering from medical problems. They were found in bed, holding hands, he with two bullet wounds in his head, she with one.

Sheldon began publishing SF in 1968, and as James Tiptree, Jr. is the author of some of the boldest and best short fiction of the 1970s—"Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death," "The Women Men Don't See," "The Screwfly Solution," and "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" are among her most celebrated stories—and of the novels *Up the Walls of the World* (1978), *Brightness Falls from the Air* (1985), and *The Starry Rift* (1986). Clear-eyed and intelligent, her work explores intractable social problems and especially those involving sexual stereotypes and relations between the sexes.

She had an adventurous childhood spent travelling in Africa and India on sometimes perilous expeditions with her parents, Herbert and Mary Bradley. Profoundly influenced by her brilliantly accomplished mother—explorer, linguist, war correspondent, and author—Sheldon had an extremely varied career that began with her working as a graphic artist, painter, and art critic. She worked for the US Army Air Force in 1942-46, becoming a Major; after the war she became the first female American photo-intelligence officer; and she taught experimental psychology and statistics at American University and at George Washington University in Washington, DC, from 1955 to 1968. She received her PhD in psychology from GWU in 1968, and began writing SF as a way of relaxing after completing her doctoral dissertation.

The name James Tiptree, Jr. had been chosen at random; but when her early stories were well received, she continued to use it (she occasionally used the name Raccoona Sheldon instead), and effectively kept her real identity secret from her admiring readership for a decade. When she answered letters from fans who wanted to know something about her, she told the truth about her career and her background but let it be thought that this was the career and background of a man named James Tiptree, Jr. Not even her agent knew the truth until after her mother died in 1977, and obituary notices betrayed Sheldon's secret to an astonished SF world.

The work of this remarkable individual is among the most exciting SF to emerge in the past 20 years. Sheldon felt very strongly that a writer's life and a writer's work should be kept separate, and she was upset when "James Tiptree, Jr" was revealed as an elderly lady in McLean, Virginia. But given the interest that her work has in countering traditional sexual stereotypes, it is surely both appropriate

and marvellous that James Tiptree is a woman. The work and life of Alice Hastings Sheldon are each extraordinary.

Linda Leith
John Abbott College

Censorship in West Germany: An Update

In your March 1987 issue, you published Florian Marzin's report on the indexing, by the Federal Examination Agency ("Bundesprüfstelle," or BPS), of Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream* and of several "Gor" novels. Spinrad's German publishers, Heyne, immediately instituted legal proceedings against the BPS decision. As their consultant in the matter, I have followed the case through several stages of appeal.

Though I would not want to deny the dangers pointed out by Dr Marzin, his final conclusions were a bit precipitate. On March 3rd, the BPS decision in the Spinrad case was definitively quashed by the Federal Administrative Court ("Bundesverwaltungsgericht"). In its opinion, the court referred to the "extensive" definition of art set forth, in 1984, by the Federal Constitutional Court ("Bundesverfassungsgericht"). As the case decided by the latter involved not only slander proceedings instituted by Bavarian Prime Minister Franz Josef Strauss, but—as the form of art to be judged—a somewhat varied rendering of Brecht's ballad "Der anachronistische Zug oder Freiheit und Democracy" by a political street theater, I thought the matter sufficiently interesting—and important—to report on it in detail in the May 1987 *Science Fiction Times*.

Rainer Eisfeld
Universität Osnabrück

For readers of German, the article by Dr. Eisfeld ("Bert Brechts glanz fällt auf Spinrad: Die Indizierung ist vom Tisch" can be obtained by writing to: Corian-Verlag/Bernhard-Monath-Str. 24 a/D-8901 Meitingen, West Germany. Its gist in regard to Spinrad is that a German court agreed with Dr. Marzin: that *The Iron Dream* indeed has certain claims to artistic merit!—RMP

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